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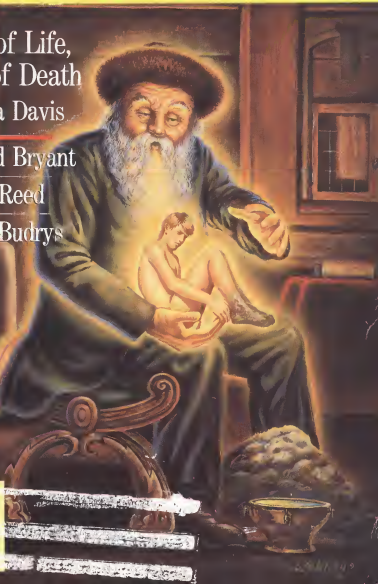
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

There is one byline missing from this issue, and it's significant because it is missing for the first time in 34 years. Last month we published Isaac Asimov's 399th science essay, in a series that has continued without interruption since November 1958. We had hoped to present number 400 in this issue, with some fanfare. That will, sadly, be delayed indefinitely; Dr. Asimov has had to stop writing the column because of health problems. We know that you join us in wishing him a rapid improvement, and we hope to elicit at least an occasional contribution in the future. We'll keep you posted on plans for the science column in the April issue.

— Edward L. Ferman

T H E M A G A Z I N E O F
Fantasy & Science Fiction

MARCH • 43rd Year of Publication

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NOVELET

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Editorial

KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH

I HAVE been able to read since I was three years old. In fact, reading is a survival skill for me. I have this belief that if I find an instruction manual somewhere, I'll be able to do anything. Experience has proven this theory wrong on the large scale (you can't fly an airplane using only a flight manual), but right on the small scale (I'm the only person in my household who understands *all* the features on the VCR). I can't imagine living without reading.

Yet, a few months ago, in New York City, I got a taste of a different life — a life led by someone partially literate. I got on the subway in Mid-Town when a sign overhead caught my eye. It was in Spanish, and it was about a job opportunity. The type of job was listed in several places, all with a variation of the same word. The ad had no pictures, although the fact that a career opportunity existed was announced in large letters. I stared at that sign for ten minutes, and in no way could I puzzle out

what kind of job was offered.

I had studied Spanish since the second grade. In college, I read Cervantes, Borges, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez — all with a dictionary beside me. Until that moment on the subway, I had considered myself bilingual. Then I realized that I didn't have the command of the written word I thought I had —and it spooked me.

For the next few days, I read the Spanish language signs everywhere I could find them. I understood seventy-five percent of them. The rest were as indecipherable as the first. My frustration grew to the point that I no longer wanted to try — especially when I would forget how to spell the words I didn't understand, so that I could no longer look them up.

I realized that if I were suddenly thrust into a Spanish speaking world, I would have the reading skills of a grade school child, and much of the written word would go past me.

This entire incident came back

to me last weekend when an author reminded me that the ability to read is a way of gaining power. Her point, that our culture (and many others) have denied minority groups the ability to read as a way of controlling them, still has relevance today — in two areas.

The obvious area appears within our own country. We place no real emphasis in our school system on the skills that will help students in their futures. We often test for ability to memorize, but rarely do we test comprehension. I can pronounce many Spanish words and guess at their placement in a sentence (and it would probably be easier if Spanish were my native language), but that doesn't mean I comprehend those words. Once people reach adulthood, admitting that they don't understand certain words or phrases becomes an embarrassment as well as a handicap and detriment.

I realize that I'm preaching to the converted here. If you can read this, you probably agree with me and are congratulating yourself for your abilities. But we have a second problem, one rarely dealt with.

North Americans have a fascinating attitude: if other countries want to do business with us, they'd damn well better learn English. Amazingly, many other countries do have bilingual (or multilingual)

cultures, and one of those languages is usually English. Why? So that they can do business with the Americans? No. Because in Europe and Asia, countries packed so tightly together, they learned the lesson long before our nation was born: if you want to survive in the world, learn the language of the group in power. Fortunately for us, the Brits and the North Americans have held sway for the last couple hundred years. Now, however, the smart money is on those who will learn Japanese and Spanish.

I recognize that most lack the time to learn another language or two — and I also know that it gets more difficult as we get older. I wish, however, that we could open our minds to other cultures.

I find it fascinating that the science fiction readers I run into often have a narrow worldview. They want to know what life is like in the stars, but could care less about the break-up of the Soviet Union. When I shared a story with a friend last week, a story with a background in German history and literature, he expressed doubt that anyone within the sf field would understand it. Perhaps they wouldn't. But my attitude is that we don't withhold the fiction just because our readers may not understand the culture. We open the doors and allow someone to walk

through if they so choose.

Ten years ago, I was a lot more literate than I am now. I was well-read in British and American literature, French, German and Japanese literature in translation, and Spanish in the original. I have forgotten much of that teaching. (Rather like Charlie in "Flowers for Algernon" as he loses his superbrain ability — I can remember that I had the knowledge, but no longer am sure what that knowledge was.) The loss scares me, just like my inability to read the sign in the subway scared me. I am losing ground, and losing power. And rather than declare that I no longer need such information (after all, I'm working in the science fiction field — and I know a lot more about that than I did ten years ago), I have decided to do something about it.

Two years ago, I saw the movie *The Old Gringo* and picked up a copy of Carlos Fuentes book — in English. (By the way, the story focuses on Ambrose Bierce who, in addition to being one of the premier journalists of his day, wrote some of the best short fiction I have ever read.) As I read, I grew more and more frustrated. I knew that English didn't have the lyrical capacity of Spanish, but I didn't want to take the time to puzzle out the Spanish version. I finally quit reading long

before I had finished the novel, because I didn't like the way the English words felt in my head.

Last week, at a bookstore in Portland, I picked up the Spanish edition, *Gringo Viejo*. I'll be taking it with me on a trip to Tucson next week, along with my trusty dictionary. I'm going to work my way through the book no matter how long it takes. Shades of grade school, when I read books way over my ability to comprehend, and caught glimpses of worlds I never knew existed.

Wish me luck. Reading is a survival skill. I may not be able to fly an airplane by reading from a flight manual, but I hope that within a year or two, the Spanish signs on the subway will no longer strike me as cryptic. It's time to take a crowbar to the door shutting out the rest of the world. In my own tiny fashion, I'll be doing that here, when I publish stories that have their base in other cultures and other literary traditions. You can do your bit by seeking such information out on your own. And if you discover something interesting, let me know. I may not be able to read it in the original, but I'll search for a good translation. Because fiction is a doorway, perhaps the best doorway of all.

Our cover story is an off-beat fantasy with an unusual angle. Grania Davis mixes a bit of history with a bit of folklore to create a tale full of golems, death, and rebirth.

Tree of Life, Book of Death

By Grania Davis

THE VILLAGE teemed with death. Located as it was in an armpit of rocky land in the Carpathian foothills, between Poland and the Ukraine, the village shtetl caught endless tidal waves of warring armies. It became a rest stop for angry, golden-haired Slavic soldiers, who tried to unwind by killing Jews and raping dark-haired Jewish women. After many generations the surviving Jews of the village became famous for their golden hair.

Then the Hapsburg empress decreed that Jews were allowed to leave the shtetlach, to settle in safe and prosperous walled towns. The tolerant Hapsburg empress knew of the legendary founding princess of Prague, who brought good fortune to her people by allowing the Jews to settle beneath her ancient castle walls. The golden-haired Jews of the village welcomed the imperial decree, and praised its wisdom. They packed their

meager belongings, pickled the scanty vegetables in their stony gardens, and prepared to depart for better lives in the bustling Slovakian market town of Gidlov.

Only one golden-haired Jewish woman did not pickle and did not pack, for she was in the throes of giving birth. The woman named Schulka lay in the back of the wagon, clutching her belly, which was big as a nobleman's house. The midwife bustled back and forth between her own packing, and supervising this improvised birthing couch, while Schulka's sisters hastily gathered her belongings with their own.

The entire village departed as a caravan, traveling the rutted dirt roads together for safety. Just before the horse-drawn wagons lurched to a start, Schulka gave birth in a burst of sweat and blood. The midwife held up two healthy, squalling twin girls, with little rings of golden fuzz crowning their heads, and little birthmarks shaped like tears of blood at the napes of their necks.

Schulka lay back in the wagon with a contented sigh, and said her twin daughters should be named Chava and Eva, and they should live like princesses in the rich walled town. Then Schulka sighed deeply again—and died in a pool of blood.

Schulka's weeping sisters took charge of the infants, and embroidered their names on their little nightshirts, so they wouldn't be confused. For it was their loving duty to honor their late sister's wishes. They fed the twins on goat's milk and honey, until the wagons stopped at a rustic town for the night. There they found a robust peasant woman whose baby girl had just died of fever, whom they hired as a wet nurse. As night fell, Chava's and Eva's tiny lips were contentedly fastened to the ample bosom of a strange, red-haired peasant woman in a strange town.

"Such a twisted dagger of fate," wept the eldest sister, Tamarka, wiping her plump cheeks on the corner of her babushka scarf. "But thank God, Schulka's sweet princesses will live."

But the peasant woman was crazed by the death of her only child, and during the night she heard the voice of the Holy Mother whisper in her grief-maddened mind. The voice said that the soul of her dead baby girl had entered the little body of Eva, who must be saved and baptized in the sacred church. So the red-haired peasant woman, named Maria, hid Eva in a hunter's hut in the forest during the night.

In the morning the weeping peasant woman told Tamarka that a one-

eyed Gypsy had climbed through the open shutters of her house, and stolen tiny Eva. Maria told how she gave chase, but the wily one-eyed gypsy moved like a cat in the dark and escaped. Tanta Tamarka and the peasant wept in their aprons over the fate of poor Eva. Maria promised to continue searching for the golden-haired infant, with the blood-drop birthmark at the nape of her neck.

Little Chava was placed in the care of a young nursing cousin, Leah, who could handle one more baby, but not two. Then the wagon caravan pulled away from the rustic town, where wildflowers grew from the thatched roofs, and storks nested in the chimneys.

"Fate twists like a dagger in my heart," kvetched Tamara to Leah, as the wagon jounced onto the rutted dirt road with Chava, the one remaining twin. The grieving women didn't notice a robust, red-haired peasant slip into the forest to claim Eva as her own.

The village Jews thrived in the town of Gidlov, which was a lively East Slovakian trading post on the road between Poland and the Ukraine. They established their homes and shops on a square at the eastern edge of town, where they built a great synagogue, grand as any church, to thank God for their good fortune. The Great Synagogue of Gidlov had walls and ceiling colorfully painted in delicate filigree, windows of dazzling stained glass, and altarpieces of heavy silver and gold. A jumble of mossy tombstones crowded the rear wall. The temple's beauty and fame attracted scholars from afar, and even a wandering wunder-rebbe from Muscovy.

Chava also grew and thrived in Gidlov. Her golden hair gleamed as she walked among the crumbling gray buildings, beneath the drizzly gray sky. As a young girl, she showed talent with words and skill with a drawing brush, and she became known as a poet and painter. She said she did not wish to marry, and her family didn't press the matter — because she had the same delicate build as her poor mother who died in childbirth.

Chava and her father boarded with Tanta Tamarka's family, and her papa and uncle drove drayage wagons, carrying trading goods to the merchants' shops. Chava spent her time at her drawing board, and helped her aunt with chores around their bustling courtyard.

Yet always there was the sense of something missing — of *someone* missing. Chava knew the story of how her twin sister was stolen as an infant by a one-eyed Gypsy. She often frequented Gypsy fairs, hoping to see a delicate, golden-haired girl among the swarthy Rom faces.

One drizzly spring day, just as the apple trees were forming fruit against the gray sky, a Gypsy circus came to Gidlov from the steppelands of the Huns. The Rom set up their tents and their booths in a meadow outside the town walls. Everyone in Gidlov was excited by the Gypsy circus. Gentiles and Jews flocked to hear the wild music and to watch the lithe sword jugglers. The townfolk wandered among Gypsy booths selling fur hats and leather boots, embroidered felt capes and amber beads, icons and housewares and spicy hot goulash.

Chava took her sketchbook to the Gypsy fair, for she loved to draw the Oriental Rom faces, so exotic, like tales from Egypt and India. She stopped to sketch an old fortune-teller, with a clip-tailed white monkey perched on one shoulder. The fortune-teller peered at his amber divination beads. He became aware of her presence, and turned to gaze at her. Then Chava saw that he had only one dark eye, and she gave a little cry.

The one-eyed Gypsy beckoned her to come closer. "Don't be afraid," he said with a gap-toothed smile. "I am only an old gray fool without an eye, and my wise companion is only an old white monkey without a tail. We can't harm you . . . but we can tell what will ease the empty place in your heart."

"You and your people have already harmed me — you created the empty place in my heart," said Chava.

"Me harm . . . what harm . . . never harm . . . ?" burbled the old Gypsy. "Such foolish talk. Come closer now; come closer. My fleas promise not to jump on you . . . though you never can trust Gypsy fleas. Come gaze at the amber beads . . . it costs only a smile . . . and see what can be seen." The old man scratched at the fleas on his burly chest.

"Where is my twin?" Chava demanded. "A one-eyed Gypsy stole her when we were just newborn babes."

"And you think it was *me*?" laughed the Gypsy, his one black eye flashing. "Me looking after a squalling, soggy baby? No, thanks; I have enough trouble looking after my mischievous monkey . . . and my famished fleas." He scratched beneath his chin, and his monkey did the same. "I apologize for the unworthy Rom who did such a terrible deed. Between you and me, did he demand a big ransom?"

"There was never any demand for ransom," said Chava.

"You think we steal babies for love or charity?" scoffed the old Gypsy, scratching inside an ear while his monkey did likewise. "Why would he

steal her, if not for ransom? It's hard to sell such a tiny babe, still needing to suck and too young to work. My wily Rom mind smells rotten goulash. Come, look with me at the amber beads." The white monkey reached out its little hand and beckoned Chava to come closer.

She knelt down on the felt blanket, facing the old Gypsy and his divination beads. The fortune-teller gazed intently into the clear amber, and stroked the beads with his grimy fingers, as if coaxing them to reveal their secrets. Then he closed his single eye.

"Ah," he said. "Aha!"

"What?" cried Chava.

"The fleas," he said. "They're chewing my groin! Also, I see a red-haired peasant woman carrying a baby into the forest. Who was she? How was she involved?" The clip-tailed white monkey anxiously scratched its groin.

"She was the wet nurse my aunt hired . . . the night my mother died . . . the night my sister was taken."

"Ah, aha! They're nibbling in my ears!" The monkey scratched frantically in its ears. The old Gypsy opened his jet-black eye and gazed again at the beads. "That's it! Your sister is still alive. The thieving wet nurse knows where to find her. And you must move quickly, my princess — because your sister is in great danger!" The white monkey chattered and bounced up and down with alarm.

TANTA TAMARKA grew hysterical, and Papa raged when Chava told them the Gypsy's words. "A dagger twists in my heart! A beautiful young woman like you mustn't wander alone to such places — or you'll disappear, too," kvetched Tamarka, as she mixed the herring with sour cream and boiled potatoes in the steamy kitchen, and set the bowl on the wooden table.

Chava helped her aunt slice the rye bread and poppy-seed strudel, and herded her younger cousins to the table. She didn't reply, for there was nothing to say. Papa poured himself a glass of hot tea. "You should stay at home and help your aunt in the kitchen," he grumbled. "This isn't the Grand Hotel."

Chava nodded silently, and the family talk shifted to other problems, especially the infected foot of their strongest drayage horse. The horses were their livelihood — and far more important than any wandering

daughter.

But Chava's mind continued to wander all that night and the next day, to the Carpatha Mountains where her baby sister was stolen. Was her twin really in great danger — and how could puny Chava find and help her?

Then she recalled the mushroom pickers, the groups of young folks who went up in the Carpatas after the spring snowmelt to gather mushrooms in the forest. They always had a good time, singing loud and jolly songs, and they returned looking tan and fit, with baskets of mushrooms to sell in the market. Surely her family would let her pick mushrooms this summer. It would be good for her health, and she could earn a few coins, and she could slip away to mountain villages to search for her missing sister.

Tanta Tamarka and Papa agreed that the mountain air would do her good, so Chava went to speak to the mushroom merchant. As she walked along the gray cobbled streets, beneath the gray sky, she nearly collided with someone dressed all in black. It was the Muscovy wunder-rebbe, lost in his mystical dreams. Chava apologized demurely.

"Your secret surrounds you like a cloud, and prevents you from seeing clearly," kvetched the wunder-rebbe.

"What secret?"

"How should I know? It's a secret, isn't it? If you want to tell me, then I'll know what secret."

Chava laughed at his illogic. "If I tell you, then it won't be a secret."

"No, but maybe you'll be able to see more clearly." His eyes gleamed with a mad and holy warmth.

Chava impulsively decided to tell him — about the one-eyed Gypsy's words, and her plan to seek mushrooms in the Carpatha Mountains — and to search for her lost twin, Eva.

"You are like two halves of a broken heart. If you don't find her, who will?" mused the scholar, twisting a chestnut-colored earlock beneath his stiff black hat. "But if she is truly in great danger, then you will be in great danger, too. Oy, little one, such a difficult secret . . . what to do?" He gazed at her with his wild and holy eyes, the color of a deep lake in a storm. Then he gestured to Chava to follow him to the Great Synagogue.

The interior of the synagogue always thrilled Chava. Whenever she sat in the women's section during holidays, her mind strayed from the prayers to the rich hues of the filigree on the arched ceilings, the glittering

chandeliers of Bohemian crystal, the marble columns, glowing stained-glass windows, and red-velvet hangings worked with gold. If only she'd been born sooner . . . and a man . . . she could have been an artist painting her soul into the walls of the holy temple.

Chava thought the wunder-rebbe would guide her to the gilded altar to say a prayer for her safety. Instead, he led her up a flight of narrow wooden stairs that led to the dusty attic, lit only by two narrow grimy windows. In the dim light, Chava saw that the wunder-rebbe's skin had a golden glow. Though he was shrouded in a long black woolen coat and a black felt hat, his powerful hands and gentle, bearded face were illuminated with warm golden light.

In one corner of the dingy attic was a mound of powdery gray earth beside an urn of scummy water. The wunder-rebbe poured the water onto the earth and kneaded it into a mound of clay. As he worked, sweat poured profusely from his brow and scented the air with honey. He chanted an eerie and discordant melody. Chava watched and listened silently as the simple clay figure of a sturdy boy took form.

When the figurine was complete, the wunder-rebbe set it upright on the floor and traced the Hebrew letters for Chava and Eva on its brow. "This is the younger brother that your mother would have borne if she had lived. His name is Asher. He is known for great strength and for loyalty to his beloved sisters. He will go with you to seek mushrooms and your missing twin."

"But he is made only of fragile clay," said Chava, feeling a sudden flash of fear as the attic filled with vibrant warmth.

"We are all made of fragile clay," thundered the wunder-rebbe. His holy madman's eyes glinted with wild light.

Then the wunder-rebbe filled his lungs so his chest expanded like the trunk of a massive tree. He blasted air in the face of the clay boy, who turned ruddy like an overheated horseshoe. The wunder-rebbe's skin blazed with a golden glow, and the scent of boiling honey filled the attic. He clasped the shoulders of the clay boy with his gentle hands, alive with golden fire, and he blew into the boy's face three times. Each time the clay flesh gained — and retained — more color.

At last the clay had the tone of human flesh, yet the boy was still a simple figurine. Chava held her breath with terror and awe. How could she believe — or not believe — what she saw and felt? The wunder-rebbe

chanted strange words in a strange melody while kneading the boy's flesh with his long, pulsing hands. His mad and holy eyes flashed golden lightning.

Suddenly the wunder-rebbe shouted in a voice like thunder, "*Awake, Asher. Awake!*"

And a sturdy lad stood in the attic, yawning and smiling winsomely. Hebrew letters formed pale scars on his forehead.

"Awake, Asher," whispered the wunder-rebbe gently.

"Oh Rabbi, was I asleep?" smiled the boy, rubbing the soft down on his cheeks. "I must have dozed off at my studies."

"It's time to wake up, Asher," repeated the rabbi, pulling playfully at the boy's golden forelock that curled beneath his cap. "Go with your sister Chava into the mountains to pick mushrooms. And you must stay with her and protect her from all harm."

"No harm will come to my sister," said Asher slowly, as if reciting a memorized prayer.

"Good boy," said the wunder-rebbe. He sighed deeply, and his skin returned to its normal pallor. "Oy, it's getting late. Let's climb down from this stuffy attic. Asher can stay with me tonight. Go speak to the mushroom merchant, Chava, and leave for the mountains at once — and next time be careful whom you bump into on the street."

The mountains were shrouded with mists, and wildflowers formed bright mosaics in rocky clearings in the forests. Chava wished she had time for her drawing board, as she and Asher joined the frolicking band of mushroom pickers along narrow and obscure pathways. They followed the muddy routes of mountain streams, to hidden glens where fairy rings of mushrooms grew. Then they fanned out to fill their baskets.

Asher was a warm and lively lad. He made friends with everyone before the first day was done. All were drawn to the sturdy and playful boy with the winsome smile. Soon he was leading mischievous games with the other boys, while his quiet and delicate sister trailed behind, wishing for her pen.

They camped like Gypsies each night, in the forest, or on the outskirts of rustic wooden villages; where smoke rose like sighs from the chimneys, and soft lamplight gleamed from windows not yet shuttered for the night. Here their leader could buy fresh milk and rye bread, cheese, and other

provisions. At each village, Chava wandered like a shadow at dusk along rutted alleys, stopping at carved wooden gates to ask wistfully if anyone knew of her lost twin. No one had seen or heard of Eva.

Then one evening, in a shabby village where pigs and chickens poked for garbage in the muddy lanes, Chava approached a group of women who gossiped around a well with a long wooden handle. As she drew near, a buxom peasant woman whose red hair was streaked with gray crossed herself and began to scream shrilly.

"My God! Holy Mother! Why did you come here, child. Did you fly back like a ghost to torment your poor auntie for her sins? Holy God! Don't you know they'll hunt you if you escape — and me, too. *He* will destroy you if he finds you're gone. They'll be waking soon. Hurry back quickly, my child!"

Chava realized she'd found the lying peasant woman, Maria — who now mistook her for Eva. "I came to see you, Auntie," she said, moving toward the woman, who crossed herself again and drew back against the stone rim of the well.

"You mustn't! You know you can't escape! It was wrong to sell you to him, my child. I know it was wrong, and I suffer the fires of Hell every day," she wept. "But what was I to do, child? You were too weak to work in the fields, like my own darling daughter who flies with the angels. And no one wanted such a weakling as a servant. Then they saw you. *He* saw you, and said you looked like a fragile porcelain figurine. I had no other choice. He offered me a good price and promised to treat you like a lady. But that's not why I sold you. You were never really mine, and I know that now. I love you, child, but I wasn't never meant to keep you. He is cold and cruel. Hurry back before your master wakes!"

"I can't do that, Auntie, because I'm not Eva. I'm her twin sister, Chava."

"Holy Mother of God!" shrieked the woman, crossing herself vehemently. "How did you find me?"

"You found me," said Chava. "I was picking mushrooms in the forest with my brother when I came upon you."

"Your brother?" asked Maria in a calmer voice. "Then your poor father remarried? He was so upset the day your sainted mother died."

"Then was the story of the thieving one-eyed Gypsy a lie?" asked Chava.

"A lie? No, no, not a lie. Thank God, he returned her to a hut in the

forest the next day," said the peasant woman, twisting her apron nervously with her big red hands.

"Then why didn't you send for my father?" demanded Chava.

"I . . . I forgot the name of the town where you were going. Your aunt wrote it on a paper . . . but I can't read." She made a feeble attempt at a gap-toothed smile.

"Your priests can read," said Chava.

"Yes, but I got fond of her. I cared for her like my own, I did, though she was a sickly child. And I never asked for a penny from anyone until she was grown."

"You tore us apart!" cried Chava. "Does she know about me? Does she know who she is?"

"She thinks she's a founding, the runt of my litter," said Maria, wiping her eyes and nose with her apron. "I even had her baptized in the holy church to save her soul."

Now it was Chava's turn to weep. Eva was eternally lost to her as a sister. Yet surely the wunder-rebbe could undo what had been done — if they could find her.

"You must tell me where my sister is," demanded Chava. "For I heard that she's in great danger. Tell me at once, and tell me truly — no lies or tales. Where is Eva?"

"You'll cause her more harm by bothering them," wept the woman. "She's in no great danger if you leave her be. But if *he* catches you snooping around, he'll snare you both like butterflies in a glass."

"Who are *they*? Why are they so beastly cruel? . . . Who is *he*?"

"I can't rightly say for sure. They are strange, child. Not like regular folks. They pay for everything with gold, and keep to themselves. You never see them at holy days or fairs. Sometimes they appear at dusk, like you, looking to buy honey or fruit. They never eat meat, far as I know. Their skin is cold and pale as moonlight, their hair is colorless as flax, and their eyes are icy blue. They use lots of fancy words, and their accent is strange. They never smile, like their faces would crack. Their master, Lord Gringore, is very strict. At first we thought they were some kind of Protestants, but now I don't know."

"And you sold poor Eva to these fanatics? Where do they live?"

"Better than working her to death in the potato fields. They have a dreary village at the far end of the road . . . atop the highest ridge, always

“Sister, that is a very strange village that lies ahead,” said Asher quietly.

covered with clouds. The sun never shines up there, and the wind howls like a wolf pack. You can't grow nothing there, only twisted trees. Why would anyone live in such a lonely place?”

“Maybe they want to be left alone.”

“We leave them well alone, and you'd better do likewise, child. If you value Eva's life — and your own.”

ASHER WAS curled up with the other boys, like a litter of drowsy pups, when Chava returned to the mushroom pickers' camp. She gazed warmly at his sleeping face, nestled in golden curls. She'd grown fond of the rascal in the short time they'd been together, as if he really were her brother. How would he react to their quest?

After their breakfast of porridge and milk, she drew him aside. “Asher,” she said, “we must leave the camp today and go up into the mountains.”

“But why?” he asked with a merry smile.

“My little sister was stolen — long before you were born — and now she's in great danger. We must find Eva quickly.”

“But I want to stay with my friends,” said Asher. “We play such crazy games. And the new mushrooms must be packed for shipping to the towns. . . . They spoil so fast. I'm the strongest boy in the camp, and I promised to help.”

“Wake up Asher!” said Chava sharply. “You must protect your sisters from harm.”

“My sisters must not be harmed,” said Asher slowly, as if reciting a memorized prayer. He rubbed the twin pale scars on his forehead.

It was a slow and laborious climb up the rutted roadway to the high ridge of the Carpatas, and the meager provisions they'd taken from the mushroom camp were quickly exhausted. They reached the end of the narrow road at dusk. Swirling mists obscured their sight, and winds howled like wolves.

“Sister, that is a very strange village that lies ahead,” said Asher quietly.

"Strange, indeed," agreed Chava, shivering in the cold wind.

Along the roadway leading up to the village were gnarled dead trees whose branches were cut at odd angles. And these branches were sharpened into pointed stakes. Sharpened tree stakes were set around the rim of the village like a weird wall. Chava shivered again, and this time it wasn't only the cold.

The houses were built of wooden shingles, with thatched roofs and delicately carved wooden porches, much like any other mountain village. But unlike other villages at dusk, there was no bustle of peasants gossiping at their gates, drawing water from the well, and settling in for the night. No children or dogs played in the alleys, and no smoke rose from the chimneys despite the cold wind.

"I think it's deserted," said Asher. "No one lives here anymore."

"I think you're wrong," said Chava as they wandered the narrow lanes. "Look at the cracks at the edges of the shutters. You can see candlelight flicker in some of the rooms."

The alley opened onto a narrow square, with a rustic, wood-shingled church topped with graceful onion domes. Chava and Asher held hands and stared. In the churchyard, where the cemetery should have been, was a tangle of sharpened tree stakes.

"This place scares me," said Asher, slowly rubbing the scars on his forehead.

"What do you want?" asked a woman's voice behind them.

Asher and Chava turned and gasped. The young woman was like a mirror image of Chava, with the same delicate features and golden hair.

"Oh Eva! Sister, we've found you! Thank God. You must come away with us at once."

"What do you want here?" repeated the woman coldly.

"We want you!" cried Chava. "Are you blind? Can't you see that we're two peas in a pod? You are my twin, stolen at birth, and this is our brother. We came to take you home."

"This is my home," said the woman.

"No, no. You were sold here as a servant, by the peasant woman who kept you from your true family. You are confused, Eva."

"How do you know my name?" asked the woman.

"Because I'm your twin!" cried Chava. "Look, if you don't believe me. Look at the birthmark on my neck, just like yours." Chava drew aside her

wind-tangled golden hair and revealed the blood-drop birthmark at the nape of her neck.

Eva scowled and felt behind her own neck. "It means nothing," she said. "Many women have yellow hair and marks on their skin. I don't know you, and I don't want to know you. Please go away. We don't want strangers here."

"Are you mad, Eva?" said Asher. "Look closely at your twin's face. It's like looking in a mirror."

"We allow no such vanities as mirrors here," she said.

"Come with us, Eva," pleaded Asher. "We play lots of fun games and eat lots of good food. We pick mushrooms in the forest and . . . well, I can't remember much before then."

"Eva! Send them away and come inside now," called a deep male voice from a big house near the churchyard of sharpened tree stakes.

"You must leave at once," said Eva. And she turned and swiftly slipped inside the house.

They followed her onto the carved wooden porch and rapped on the door. It opened a crack, and dim candlelight revealed a tall and gaunt man, with hair and skin so pale that he seemed to shimmer.

"What do you want? We don't welcome strangers here," said the man in a hollow, rumbling voice.

"Eva is my twin. I came to see her."

"You have seen her," he rumbled. "She does not recall any twin."

"We were separated at birth, and. . . ."

"Oh, come in, then; come in," said the man. He gazed at them with ice-blue eyes and opened the door a bit wider. "You are persistent in your childish delusion. You think my kitchen wench is your lost sister because she vaguely resembles you. Meanwhile, it's getting late, and you have no place to spend the night. If you two innocents are eaten by wolves, every peasant in the mountains will be after my head. So come in, then. Get warm, and have some supper and some sleep, and you'll soon see that Eva hardly resembles you at all."

"But she *does* . . .," began Asher. Chava hushed him.

They wiped their boots and entered the parlor, which was elegantly furnished in white-and-gold antiques, quite unexpected in such an isolated place. A prismatic crystal chandelier cast glinting light on the lavish gilded furnishings, and on the tall man's hair and skin, which were almost

transparently pale.

"I am Lord Gringore," he rumbled. "I have retired from the complex life of the royal court to live simply in this mountain retreat. You may share my rustic home tonight, children, and be on your way at dawn."

"I want to talk to Eva," insisted Chava.

"Very well," said Lord Gringore with a resigned sigh. "Eva, dear, please give our young guests some supper, and keep them amused while I read in my study. We eat simply here, but healthfully."

Eva brought bowls of curds, honey and wild berries, and brown bread and sweet butter to the table. Asher dug in like a boy who hasn't eaten in weeks, while Chava and Eva gazed at each other.

"You truly don't recognize me?" asked Chava.

"I never saw you before. Why should I recognize you?" asked Eva stiffly.

"But surely you see the resemblance between us . . . and the birthmark. . . ."

"I am very common. Many frail women look like me. I feel nothing special toward you. . . . I feel nothing."

"Are you happy here? Does he treat you well?" asked Chava.

"Lord Gringore is . . . unusual," said Eva slowly. "I am content to be in his presence."

"Awake, Eva!" said Asher. He glanced up from his bowl with eyes blazing soft fire. "Gringore has you bewitched, doesn't he?"

Eva seemed startled. Chava looked at Asher and nodded. The lad was right. Eva spoke and moved like someone in a trance.

The room was comfortable, with feather beds and down pillows, and Chava realized she was exhausted. She hadn't slept well since leaving home, and she sank into slumber like a pebble in a pond. She rose to consciousness again with a strange sound . . . of weeping. Chava sat up and saw that Asher was also awake.

"It sounds like Eva," he whispered.

They slipped quietly from the room and saw that a crystal lamp was still burning in Lord Gringore's study. "You mindless doll!" they heard him snarl.

"Please, Lord. I meant nothing by it!" wept Eva.

Chava and Asher crept to either side of the doorway and peered inside. Lord Gringore stood tall and arrogant in a white satin dressing robe that

reflected the sheen of his skin. Eva stood before him in a white velvet nightgown, with her head meekly bowed.

Gringore grasped Eva's narrow wrist tightly in his long white fingers. "You encouraged them, you fool; I heard you." His pale eyes flashed cold blue fire.

"I tried not to, Lord. Truly I tried."

Eva's long sleeve slipped back, and Chava saw that her sister's arm was stained with livid bruises.

"Try harder, or know my rage," Gringore rumbled. His free hand grabbed a thick coil of golden hair and twisted Eva's head sideways. Her breath fluttered like a trapped bird.

Asher put his fingertips to the scars on his forehead, as if deep in thought. Then his face hardened with resolve. "No one will harm my sister!" he shouted, striding forcefully into the room.

"Be gone, little boy," scowled Lord Gringore.

"Only if Eva comes with us."

"Do you want to go with these ragged mushroom pickers, Eva?" he sneered.

"Oh no, my lord, I want to be with you."

"But he hurts you, Eva," said Asher, looking puzzled.

"He never means to. . . . He is very kind."

"You heard the wench," said Gringore. "Now be gone and leave us alone." He grabbed Asher's sturdy shoulder and pushed him toward the door.

"Eva is bewitched!" said Asher, and he shoved Lord Gringore's narrow shoulder with his powerful arm.

Gringore laughed in a resonant tone. "You are made of flimsy stuff, lad; you shouldn't play too rough." His long white hand formed a fist and cracked Asher's jaw — which crumbled slowly at the blow like a broken earthenware jar.

Chava screamed with rage . . . and sorrow . . . and fear.

Asher didn't cry out or bleed, and seemed to feel no pain. He stood in a shocked daze, holding the jagged wound where his jaw had been, and staring at the scattered clay shards on the oriental rug.

"No harm will come to my sisters," he stammered, and pummeled wildly at Lord Gringore with his own fists.

"Still haven't learned, lad," said Gringore, dodging the blows skillfully.

He aimed his hand like a shimmering hammer at Asher's left shoulder—which shattered at the impact and crashed to the floor.

"Stop, Asher; please stop. He'll kill you!" wept Chava.

Asher stood very still with his arms hanging limply at his sides. The edge of his right jaw and a big chunk of his left shoulder lay scattered on the carpet in jagged shards of clay. His good right hand stroked the scars on his forehead. Tears welled in his eyes and streamed down his ruddy cheeks. "Awake, Asher. No harm must come to your sisters," he whispered in a voice now slurred by his shattered jaw.

"Asher!" sobbed Chava. "Go back to Gidlov. Find the wunder-rebbe. Only he can heal you."

Asher nodded slowly, then turned abruptly and fled.

Chava darted after him, then stopped. Should she follow her injured brother, or stay with Eva? Lord Gringore made the decision for her by locking the door with a firm click.

The book-lined room was silent except for the hissing crystal lamp and Chava's sobs.

Lord Gringore's chuckle was a hollow tone in his throat, like an old bell. The lamplight blazed on his gleaming hair and skin. His pale blue eyes flashed frozen light as they fixed on Chava. "At last," he said, "the lovely twins are reunited."

CHAVA DECIDED to watch and wait. She would appear to join Eva in Lord Gringore's service, while she observed him and his dreadful power over her sister. Gringore grew cool and indifferent toward her, as though it didn't matter if she departed or stayed.

The day of the full moon, Eva was in a frenzied bustle in the kitchen. "They are gathering here tonight," she fretted to Chava as she nervously sliced newly ripe apples and strained soured milk curds, which she mixed with honey. Chava calmly helped her slice and strain, much as she helped Tanta Tamarka in the kitchen. Eva tensely tucked a wisp of hair behind her ear, and Chava wondered why this simple meal caused her twin such dread.

At moonrise the twelve guests arrived from the few occupied houses in the village of sharpened tree stakes. Chava quickly saw that they were unlike any guests ever seen in her aunt's parlor. They seemed to be cut from the same brittle mold as Lord Gringore: tall and arrogant and pale,

with translucent skin and hair, and glassy blue eyes. The six ladies sparkled like windblown snowflakes in robes of glinting white silk, with beads of cut crystal flashing at their necks and wrists. The six men moved stiffly, in flowing white felt capes.

The long table was set simply for thirteen, with a white lace cloth, glowing silver spoons, and cut crystal goblets and bowls that glistened beneath the crystal chandelier. Lord Gringore stood at the head, and the men and women rigidly faced each other from opposite sides. As they took their seats with silent grace, Chava thought they seemed like a brightly lit pageant of lifeless puppets.

Lord Gringore silently gestured to Chava to pour mead in the goblets; and silently, she obeyed. Eva meekly served the apples, curds, and honey from a heavy crystal tureen. Lord Gringore raised his glass in a curt salute, and the weird banquet began. Chava waited for conversation, prayer, laughter . . . any sign of life, but she waited in vain. There was no sound except the chiming of silver against crystal.

They ate and drank very little, as if they rarely felt hunger. Then they stopped with frozen smiles, and listened expectantly. Lord Gringore tapped his goblet with his spoon, which sang out a deep, clear tone. The others tapped their goblets in turn, so an eerie melody rang out from the silver-and crystal carillon. Chava listened and wondered at this unearthly gathering. Who were these strange beings, and where did they come from? Were they humankind, or shadowy creatures of moonlight and mist? The uncanny chiming faded away. Then, with silent grace, they rose in unison from the long table, bowed somberly, and floated away in the pale moonlight.

The twins swiftly cleared the table, then Lord Gringore ordered Eva into the kitchen. She fled with a look of great relief, like a creature freed from slaughter. Gringore beckoned Chava to the seat beside him. "Sit with me for a moment, child. The moon is setting, and I am weary and filled with angst," he rumbled.

"Your friends were very odd," said Chava. "They ate almost nothing and spoke not one word."

"Many kinds of ancient beings dwell in the shadows of these mountains," said Gringore with a timeless sigh. "And not all thrive in warmth and sunlight like you and your timid twin."

"Are you not humankind?" asked Chava.

"No more or less humankind than your sweet brother."

Chava fell silent, for there were many strange things that she would never understand.

Lord Gringore's long fingers, cool and pale as moonlight, reached out to take her hand. "Your blood has the warmth of sunlight . . . warmth that can renew me," he murmured. Chava drew back in revulsion and fear. Then she felt his luminous gaze pull her closer . . . closer to his brittle touch. His icy fingertips hungrily stroked her cheek.

"So soft, child. Yes, I need your warmth to revive me as the moon wanes," he whispered. He stared irresistibly into her eyes with cold and consuming fire, and his caressing fingers strayed to the blood-drop birthmark at the nape of her neck. His breath quickened.

"Please, my lord," she began, trembling. But even Chava no longer knew whether she begged him to stop — or begged for his unearthly touch.

There was a loud, banging crash — and Asher burst into the room. Beside him was the one-eyed Gypsy and his clip-tailed white monkey, who gazed at them with wise and benevolent eyes. Gringore's spell was broken, and Chava leaped up to embrace her brother. Eva scurried in from the kitchen to observe the commotion.

"Who are you?" demanded Lord Gringore. His angry face was taut as a drum.

"I am a simple man of the steppeland Rom people," said the Gypsy with a flourishing bow. "I met this lad in the forest, and we made a good match. You see, he is strong and loyal, but lacks a shoulder and a jaw. I am wily, but lack an eye, and my clever monkey lacks a tail — so among us we are complete and whole. Asher said we'd find his sisters here, and I see two lovely ladies waiting to greet us, like two identical dill pickles in a barrel."

"Get out!" roared Gringore. His eyes raged like beasts.

"Oh, but my feet are tired, and my fleas need a rest," said the Gypsy with a sly smile, twirling his mustaches. He stood with his burly back blocking the door, caught Chava's eye, and glanced at Eva. Chava positioned herself so she could block any sudden move by her sister. Asher and Lord Gringore faced each other in the center of the room.

"You're not too bright, lad," said Gringore. "You've returned for another lesson."

"I'll remain until my sisters are free," said Asher. His speech was slurred by

his broken jaw and his left arm was limp beneath his shattered shoulder.

Gringore snarled like an animal torn from its prey, then abruptly lashed out with his lightning fist. Asher's eyes clouded with pain as his left ear smashed to the floor.

Chava and Eva moved closer and fearfully clasped hands. How long could Asher withstand such cruel blows?

This time, Asher didn't stop to weep in confused grief. Instead, he drew in his breath until his broad chest was round as a barrel. Then he blasted air at Lord Gringore's face. At the same time, he deftly aimed a mighty kick at Gringore's vicious right arm — which burst into bloodless fragments of glittering crystal that shattered to the floor.

They all stared in shock, and the monkey hooted. Asher glanced at Chava with the remnant of a proud, boyish grin.

Eva screamed in terror and fell to the ground to gather the bits of broken crystal that had been Lord Gringore's arm. Chava pulled Eva to her feet and held her tightly.

Gringore gazed at his splintered arm with a mild ennui. "You see, child, many kinds of beings live in these mountains. Some are made of flesh and some of dust," he said warily to Chava. "My people are as old as the crystal rocks themselves."

Gringore and Asher began to circle each other warily, like two torn stags whose final strength was summoned for this deadly battle. Then, in a whirl of motion too swift for Chava to see, they collided in an explosive blur. There were horrible sounds of cracking crystal and bursting pottery. Sharp fragments of glistening glass and gritty clay flew around the room. The white monkey stared with wise old eyes and chattered with excitement.

At last there was silence. Pieces of pulverized crystal and clay, and scraps of torn cloth, were thrown around the room. Some of the larger bits still retained the form of an eye or a nose or a hand, but they were lifeless. Asher and Lord Gringore were gone.

Chava and Eva both knelt weeping on the floor to gather the shards. Chava carefully piled on the oriental rug the clay fragments that had been the laughing and mischievous lad named Asher.

Eva began to collect the cold crystal remnants of Lord Gringore, then she paused and glanced shyly at Chava, like someone just waking from sleep. She pulled up her sleeve to reveal the bruises on her arm. "He hurt

me," she said slowly. "And he would have hurt you, too. He wasn't humankind, you know. He and his people are cruel creatures that were born of mountain crystal and sired by moonlight. When the moon wanes, they loose their strength and must drain the vitality of someone warm. He enchanted me and drank my essence like wine, and he would have done the same to you."

"Yes, I know, sister," said Chava.

"... Sister," said Eva softly, as though she'd just heard the word for the first time. "Yes, I see that now, like an image in the mirror. And the mark on your neck . . . is just like mine. Oh . . . Sister!" She fell weeping and laughing into Chava's arms.

The one-eyed Gypsy snuffled and wiped a tear from his grimy cheek as he and his monkey scratched wistfully at their fleas.

"We have a brother, too," said Chava. "We must gather every clay bit and take him home with us — to be healed."

"I will help you . . . Sister," said Eva. Her face glowed with wonder at her newfound free will. "I will travel with you to our home, for I have never had a home. And perhaps Lord Gringore's secret hoard of gold would also be helpful."

"Gold?" said the Gypsy. "Did you say gold?" He strutted and cavorted with his hooting monkey. "Gold is heavy stuff. Such delicate ladies mustn't burden themselves. Allow your humble Rom servant to carry the gold through the treacherous mountain pathways." He winked and leered broadly, and the monkey chattered.

"You shall carry a third of the gold where you will, and I'll carry the rest," said Eva with newly discovered strength. "Chava will carry Asher's remains in a silken shroud."

"Will the other crystal-folk try to follow us?" asked Chava fearfully as they left the house.

"I think not," said Eva. "For the moon is setting, and now they are at rest."

"May they rest in their unholy peace," said the one-eyed Gypsy fortune-teller, fingering his amber beads. The white monkey gazed at the dark village with wise compassionate eyes.

Thus they slipped quietly from the village of sharpened tree stakes, on the high Carpathian ridge, in the waning moonlight.

* * *

Though it was shabby and gray, the town of Gidlov had never looked more beautiful to Chava. The one-eyed Gypsy had accompanied them safely to the meadow at the edge of town, where he and Chava first met. Then, with a flourishing bow and a jaunty scratch at his fleas, the Gypsy vanished, with his white monkey and portion of gold, into the river valley mists.

Chava and Eva stood alone on a rise overlooking the town, with Asher's remains in a silken pouch. "I never saw so many houses," said Eva. Her pallid face showed some healthy color after their trek through the wooded slopes. "Perhaps we can use some of the gold to get a little cottage. For your . . . our family doesn't know me yet, and I'm not familiar with their ways. We could all live in a sunny cottage surrounded by flower gardens, where Asher could play his games. And you could teach me to use a drawing brush, for I always wanted to learn. What do you think . . . Sister?"

"I think that's a splendid idea," said Chava. "But first we must take our brother to the wunder-rebbe to be healed."

"Such a grand building!" cried Eva when they reached the Great Synagogue. "Is it a church? But where is the cross?"

"You have much to learn about your people," said Chava.

They found the wunder-rebbe absorbed in his prayers, swaying back and forth with earlocks aflutter, as if rocked by divine winds. Chava didn't want to disturb him, but her mission couldn't wait.

"Rabbi! I freed my sister — but Asher was destroyed."

The wunder-rebbe paused in his chanting, chestnut earlocks still quivering, and opened his eyes peacefully. He looked from one twin to the other, and a smile lit his gentle eyes like sunlight on a holy lake. "Such a joy to see two halves united and whole again," he said.

"I found a sister and lost a brother. Asher must also become whole again," cried Chava opening the silken pouch to reveal the shattered clay shards.

"Oy. Such a sweet boy . . . such a beating. Such a twisted dagger of fate. Come with me upstairs," said the rabbi.

They followed him from the dazzling temple of gilt and filigree, up the narrow stairs to the dark and dusty attic. There the rabbi poured Asher's remains onto the pile of dusty clay on the floor.

"You should understand, Chavale, little one, that the Tree of Life creates the pages of the Book of Death. They are one and the same," said the wunder-rebbe.

"Yes, but Asher must live and laugh again," wept Chava, longing for her brother's frolicking games and winsome smile.

"Did he ever really live in this world?" asked the rabbi. He placed his gentle hands on Asher's remains, and his skin glowed golden again. The scent of warm honey filled the room. He chanted in a voice so sweet that Chava sensed angels pausing in flight to listen.

She felt sorrowful yet soothed.

"Sleep now, Asher. Return to peaceful dust," murmured the wunder-rebbe. "You have done well, lad, and now you may rest."

Golden light filled the room, and the universe opened. Then Asher crumbled into the lifeless clay dust from which he had been born.



A few months ago, I had mentioned that I had seen few stories about the Gulf War. One of the few that I saw was this one. But "The Resurrection of Alonso Quijana" is about more than a war that occurs in the late 20th century. Marcos Donnelly manages to mix the legacy left by Miguel Cervantes in Don Quijote with some very real modern day concerns. And, for all that, he manages to throw in some humor too. Marcos is a New York writer who began his career with two sales to Bantam's Full Spectrum anthologies.

THE RESURRECTION OF ALONSO QUIJANA

translation and annotation

By Marcos Donnelly

Translator's Note: The following tale is translated from a quite old-looking manuscript of Cervantes' El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de La Mancha, a text discovered by my brother Martin in a house of shady repute several kilometers south of Montreal. I never learned what my brother was doing in the upstairs closet of that hovel, but he subsequently smuggled the manuscript past U.S. and Canadian Customs — for the sake of literature, boldly disregarding the risk of substantial border delay. I here publish a Cervantes selection that has not appeared in earlier translations of his masterpiece, and leave the determination of its legitimacy to the scholarly community and the reading public.

A Foreword by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

B

EING DEAD, I SHALL BE
brief.

A number of my colleagues in the afterlife have taken to publishing additional works after their own deaths. Until recently, I have abhorred this practice. Necessity

compels me, however, to once again take up pen to further elucidate the nature of my gift to the world, one Alonso Quijana, who in madness pretended himself a valiant knight-errant, Don Quijote de La Mancha. Since my departure from mortality, my mad knight has been variously ballad-ed, poem-ed, opera-ed, theater-ed, and even, God save us, adjectiv-ed: "*quixotic*, romantically chivalric, having high but impractical sentiments, aims, etc."

Rot and rubbish. You've all missed the point.

Don Quijote was born for me alone — so a pox and the clap and a shot in the bum to all of you who have bastardized my grand theme. Wherein your "Quijote" would melt innocent hearts, mine would in delusion pierce them through (as I thought I had made clear in my first collection of the insane vagabond's tales). And wherein your "Quijote" possesses lips that would burst into enchanting melody, mine sports a mouth that spews vomit in the face of his idiot squire.

So the heirs of my legacy have been fools with my fortune. I hereby disown them to make clear, yet again, the nature of the Manchegan madman.

II, lxxiv, supplement A: In which our knight awakens sane from his mysterious sleep.

AS IS the wont of all things, particularly things human, Don Quijote found himself at the stairway of paradise, confined now to bed to await the mortal coming of immortality. The physician sent for by his faithful friends — Sansón, Sancho, and Nicolás the Barber — declared that melancholy and fantastic defeat had robbed the knight-errant of his vital spirits, of his desire to stay his residence within the mortal tent in which our souls pass earthly pilgrimage for but a while — in short, Don Quijote was dying.

Our knight requested that his friends leave him for a time, as he wished to rest. They retired, and he had a long, unbroken sleep of more than six hours. When he awoke, his friends heard him calling out in a loud voice, and they rushed to his bedside.

"Blessed be God!" the knight exclaimed. "In His mercy, my delusions have left me! for I no longer fancy myself Don Quijote, but am again Alonso Quijana el Bueno, formerly respected of the world for his virtuous life."

His friends, hearing him, were sorely troubled, believing some new madness had overtaken their master. But Don Quijote summoned his squire close to him and in confidence asked: "Tell me, loyal friend. Have you any notion what would mean such terms as *machismo* and *cojones*?"

His squire, worried that his master now insisted on being called by the old name, answered carefully: "I would only guess, my lord, that the one would speak of being male and the other speak of great big boxes."¹

"Nay," Don Quijote growled, of a sudden quite angry. "T'was a strange adventure, and now my eyes are opened, my friend. T'was indeed the greatest and most horrible of all my adventures."

"And you had it in *bed*, my lord?"

"I tell you, Sancho, that knight-errantry is evil! It must at once be banished! Condemned! Abandoned, Sancho, utterly abandoned!" The ferocity of Don Quijote made him to weep, and he cried, "Dulcinea! My sweet lady Dulcinea, how I have been deceived!"

Sancho was sorely worried by his master's cursing of knight-errantry, fearing that now there would never arrive the afore promised lands and treasures and conquered islands. "My lord," he said, "what adventure, however horrid, could make a valiant knight forswear his noble and, I must add, potentially very profitable calling?"

"I am not your lord," Don Quijote snapped. "I am Alonso Quijana el Bueno."

II, lxxiv, supplement B: In which our knight considers the strange adventure that befell him in his sleep.

DURING HIS six hours of repose, Don Quijote fell into a dream that he took to be real, and which he therefore counted as his greatest adventure of all. Finding himself inexplicably in a mist, Don Quijote wandered in attempt to find anew the bed he had been enjoying so. Venturing far, Don Quijote became weary, and in his mind he fancied hearing the voice of Frestón, that mad enchanter who had plagued so many of the knight's valiant adventurers. The voice of Frestón spoke thus to Don Quijote: "Foolish pretender! Germ of the foul offspring

1. Sancho here understandably confuses *cojones*, a twentieth-century obscenity for "testicles," with its older and unquestionably less interesting meaning.

of a griffin's vomit block!² Know ye not what evil thou hast sustained in the world?"

"I shall answer you," quoth Don Quijote, "but the demon in your mind, foul Frestón, shall render my apologia incomprehensible to the likes of you: I have fought for justice, truth, and chivalry in the name of my lady Dulcinea."

"Cretin!" screamed the voice of the enchanter. "Thou has beaten on innocents! Thou hast broken the legs of mourners in funeral processions! Thou hast thrashed men of cloth and of valor, and they on their parts have thrashed a fool! Thou, Don Quijote, art a twerp!"

Rage overcoming his fear, the knight swore by lance and sword: "You shall pay for your malhumor, Frestón! My doughty arm shall rip the wires from your spark plugs and rupture your radiator!"³

Then the mist before our fearless knight parted and opened itself to a vast desert wasteland. "See thy principles, Don Quijote de La Mancha. See the world thou hast helped create." Trembling with fury, Don Quijote stepped from the mists into the desert conjured by Frestón. "This is thy land of chivalry, knight-pretender. Find they truth in the sands of Sudúrabu."⁴ Whereupon the mists dispelled, and Don Quijote stood in the sands of that strange country.

There wandered through the wasteland a recalcitrant soldier named Santiago Rojas of the U.S. Army, who, sick with worry about the beginnings of war in Sudúrabu, and justifying himself by insisting he had joined the Army only to have regular work, and not to fight wars or to be all that he could be, had secreted himself away from his company, his companions, and his compatriots. This decrepit, having been educated in twentieth-century city schools of the New World, mistakenly believed himself capable of journeying home from the warring desert if only he were to travel northwest.⁵

So it was this unworthy who came upon our knight-errant in the

2. A difficult phrase to interpret, although certainly a vile oath of some sort.

3. This line is undoubtedly the addition of later editors.

4. After careful consideration, I've opted to keep this word in the manuscript's original form. It should be noted, however, that my brother insists it means "Saudi Arabia," while my Dad prefers "South Hampton."

5. Geographical studies prove that this sort of journey would be extremely difficult, thus confirming the claim of Santiago's poor education.

desert, spying him from afar. Santiago quaked to his very Army-commissioned leather boots upon seeing Don Quijote, for he feared that there would be military patrols hunting him to punish his desertion.

As Don Quijote drew closer, Santiago lost his fear and grew amazed, for never had he seen so ludicrous a sight as our knight-errant. Don Quijote sported a metal basin as helm, and his beaver was bent plasterboard poked with holes for breathing; his sword was fusted, as dull on the sharp side as it was sharp on the dull; his lance was twisted, as blunt on the pointed side as it was pointed on the blunt.⁶ And Santiago for a moment thought he was seeing a mirage.

For his part, Don Quijote thought he had come across another knight who, like himself, was a victim of Frestón's enchantments. Cautious, however, he called to the man: "Ho! Valiant knight or pretender? Speak your intent, and hither and whence as well, that I might determine whether I shall greet you as friend or remove your guts from your stomach!"

The soldier called back to Don Quijote in a tongue that, while Spanish, was harsh and hissing and skipped far too many consonants to be called Castellano. Nonetheless, Don Quijote understood, hearing the man's name to be Saint James the Red. Saint James followed his name with a string of numbers, and Don Quijote determined that this was no knight, but instead a valiant wizard. (For Don Quijote had read that many wizards practiced their art by the use of magic numbers.)

"You with the Army?" asked Santiago.

"Good Saint James," quoth Don Quijote, "I shall assist any army that fights for truth and justice, but I am tied to no force. I am a knight-errant."

Santiago was greatly relieved, for in his style of Spanish, "knight-errant" sounded to him like "a wandering gentleman." So he asked Don Quijote: "You know how far it is to Paris?"

"I know not," quoth Don Quijote. "Are we perchance in France?"

"Nah, we're in Sudúrabu. Gotta go around Chordini, I guess. Never got much geography in school, see? But I'm getting myself to Paris and catching the first plane out of here to America."

Don Quijote was hard pressed to follow these words, so his delusion made him to understand that this noble wizard intended to conquer the

6. Such euphuistic turns of phrase are common in Cervantes' work, although my sister Cheryl, a social worker, insists the device is used subconsciously, revealing Cervantes' confusion and fears concerning his own masculinity.

city of Paris. "Ho and hie, then!" quoth Don Quijote. "Suffer me to journey with you, that I might lend my doughty arm and sturdy lance to your fearsome magic. For know ye, noble Saint James the Red, it is no ordinary knight with whom you converse, but the servant of the finest, purest, and most exalted of all women, the incomparable Dulcinea; I am her warrior, the famed Don Quijote de La Mancha, Knight of the Sad Figure."

Saint James gazed upon the face of Don Quijote for so much time without speaking that Don Quijote concluded such behavior must not be deemed rude in the homeland of Saint James. When Saint James at last spoke, Don Quijote was further befuddled, for the wizard chanted a dozen times and twice a dozen more: "Sacred feces. Sacred feces."⁷ Then Don Quijote recalled that he had heard of far-off lands where cows were worshiped; and if the cows, why not the manure of cows, which fertilized the land and brought forth plants and fruit to nourish the body? So Don Quijote determined he should honor the wizard's customs, and, nodding his head to match rhythm, he joined the chant, saying along with Saint James the Red: "Sacred feces. Sacred feces."

At once Don Quijote heard the rumbling of thunder, although there was in the sky not a single cloud. Before he could make inquiry concerning this marvel, Saint James the Red knocked him from his feet. "Jesus Christ!" the wizard prayed harshly. "Border patrol!"

II, lxxiv, supplement C: In which Don Quijote faces the minions of the Moor Brandabaran.

DON QUIJOTE spit great quantities of sand from his mouth, for he had been gaping when knocked face-first to the desert floor. "What a strange enchantment is this!" he managed to say. "For I see before us a lion made of iron storming 'cross the sands!"

"Shaddup!" said valiant Saint James. "Oh Jesus, those are Airachis!⁸ I'm farther north than I thought!"

"Then rejoice," said Don Quijote. "We are all the closer to Paris for it."

7. My brother Martin prefers a less dignified translation of this phrase.

8. This term is also retained in the original manuscript's form. My dad suggests the translation "Iroquois," holding that those American Indian tribes were indeed situated somewhat north of South Hampton. My brother insists on "Iraquis," allowing topical bias to cloud his scholarly vision.

Don Quijote again looked upon the iron lion and perceived on its back three men whose headdresses were unmistakably the foolish garb of Moors. Over the headdresses, each wore a simple, unadorned helm, as if trying to hide their true identities from the keen eyes of Don Quijote.

"By the fingernails of Saint Conklin's mother!" hollered the knight, raising himself to full stature. "Know you not who these be, righteous Saint James? None other than minions of Brandabaran, Lord of the Three Arabias, come to rob more land for their demented sultan! Come, Saint James! For what are mere henchmen to a knight and a wizard such as we?" Whence Don Quijote called upon the name of his beloved Dulcinea, and Saint James, still prostrate, resumed his mystical Chant of the Sacred Feces.

Now the three Moors, seeing the old man approach them with a twisted stick, raised their own weapons; but they did so with only half a heart. For the knight seemed to them entirely harmless, and the moaning heap behind the knight appeared to them to be one wounded who, if not yet dead, then soon would be thanks to nature and the desert sun.

"He looks malnourished; do you think he's an escaped hostage?" the youngest of the three asked his leader. The leader considered this question, then called to Don Quijote: "Say! Halt there, you! Are you a hostage?"

Don Quijote, who had a difficult enough time understanding Santiago, hadn't the slightest clue what the singsongy words of his adversaries meant, but he understood the Moors to be mocking him with baby talk. He charged with his lance, feeling both enraged and confident, for although his opponents themselves carried lances, their lances were short and gnarled and stubby at the ends; judged as lances, they were inferior even to Don Quijote's own.

Just as he was about to pierce the heart of the closest wicked Moor—the one who was the youngest—the Moor nudged aside the feeble tip of the knight's lance, and Don Quijote found himself hurtling forward of his own velocity. He wound up once again with a mouthful of the Sudūrabu's burning sands.

The young Moor soldier laughed heartily at this, and his companions, still upon the back of the iron lion, likewise roared with mirth. "Shall I radio this in?" the soldier Moor asked his captain, but the captain stayed him, enjoying the folly of Don Quijote and suggesting they could have a bit more fun with the knight.

"No, no," said the youngest, for his soul was kind; he, like Santiago, had joined his Army for the benefit of regular meals, and every month he sent much of his pay to his wife, his infant daughter, and his brother who watched over them at home. "The man is an old fool, made crazy by the heat. We've had fun, and now we should help him up and ask what in the name of Allah he's doing so far out in the desert." And the youngest Moor walked toward Don Quijote to do just that.

Don Quijote had by now managed to roll himself over on his back; bruised from his second fall, however, he could not yet bring himself to his feet. Seeing his enemy advancing, and convinced that he was about to be pierced through, Don Quijote swung his lance, albeit feebly, at the Moor.

It was through simple Fortune and the hand of Providence that the lance, while missing the Moor himself, struck the enemy's own gnarled, stunted weapon. The young Moor, seeing nothing to fear in our ferocious knight, had been holding his weapon much too loosely, and, for that matter, backward. When Don Quijote's lance struck it, the tip became caught under the weapon's handle. The Moor jerked back by instinct, and there filled the air a sound like a dozen stones pelting a steel basin. This was, in fact, something like what was happening, for the Moor's weapon spit forth a series of volleys faster than any knight had ever seen, and those volleys pierced the side of the iron dragon. Don Quijote heard the Moor's sudden exclamations of ". . ."⁹ and so deadly were the volleys that before you could say, "'S' wounds and 'S' blood!", the lion exploded, thoroughly toasting the two Moors on its back and throwing the upper part of the youngest Moor a good twenty lengths, the lower part a good thirty-five.

Don Quijote, being flat on the ground, was not harmed greatly, save that half the hair of his head was singed and his basin helm was significantly dented.

"Victory!" yelled the undaunted knight. "You, Saint James! You have brought us victory! I know not what strange incantation you have used to consume the iron lion and the minions of Brandabaran in the Holy Flame

9. The text here is written in Arabic, a language in which I am not adept. My brother, who once dated a Tunisian girl, says he believes the translation is similar to Santiago's "Sacred Feces" oath. I have not verified this, but the reader should be aware of a possible motif.

of God, but your success was thorough! Now more than before am I committed to standing by your side in our great siege of Paris!"

Santiago, at last looking up, was awed by the utter destruction wrought by Don Quijote. He suspected for the first time that there was something more than met the eye to this wandering gentleman. Then, seeing what remained of the three Airachis, he promptly vomited.

II, lxxiv, supplement D: In which Saint James learns our knight's chivalric philosophies.

AFTER TAKING repast on the rations Santiago had stolen for his desertion, the companions watched the fierce sun set behind the endless banks and waves and hills of the sands of the Sudúrabu [...]¹⁰ And our knight and his companion sat for rest and discussion, warming their hands in the rapid chill of night over Saint James' magic lamp that gave off heat but no smoke or flame. And Don Quijote spoke thus to Saint James: "Would it not, good and valorous friend, be more sensible for us to travel by the moon than by the sun? For we would do better to travel briskly in the cold than to travel sluggishly by Apollo's unkindness."

Saint James the Red answered: "I thought about that, but I think they've got infrared shit that can see you better in the night. 'Sides, who the hell would think I'd cross by day? Only an idiot would do that."

"Well said, wizard," quoth Don Quijote. "By acting as fools when our enemy knows us not as fools, then we shall wisely be fools indeed, fooling them all! And even if we bake and rot like fish jumped too far from shore, we shall perish knowing the wisdom of our folly and the folly of our enemy's wisdom."

And the words of Don Quijote much confounded Santiago.

"Tell me something, old man," Santiago said. "What in hell you doing out here? We gotta be, I dunno, a hundred miles from Spain, and maybe even two hundred from the United States.¹¹ What's your act?"

Quoth Don Quijote, only partially understanding the wizard: "I am

10. On the advice of my dad, I have here deleted four tedious paragraphs of description for which the twentieth-century audience would have little patience.

11. My calculations show that Santiago's figures are inaccurate.

upon this earth to kill for the sake of life and to battle for the sake of peace."

"You oughta fit right in," said Santiago.

Don Quijote noted the sarcasm with which Santiago had spoken, but forgave him in his heart, knowing that wizards were not as familiar with physical conflicts as were knights-errant. But still wishing to defend his good name and his profession, the knight said: "Know you not, wizard, the sanctity of my calling? Do you not share my belief in the honor of men and the beauty of women?"

"Look, man," said Saint James the Red. "All I know is that I'm over here getting shot at because gas costs too much, and even though I'm here, it costs too much anyway. My recruiter didn't say nothing about risking getting killed for gas."

"Then forgive me," quoth the knight, "but you are a fool, and twice a fool at that. Does a man join the field of battle not expecting violence? He who does is deceived. And does a true man, gifted by Providence with the opportunity to draw his enemy's blood, scoff at that gift? Nay, Saint James; though a just man face the prospect of losing an ear or an eye or a leg or his tongue or even his very britches burnt from his bottom, he should thank Heaven for the honor of slicing the skin from his foe. How else shall a knight honor his lady? This is true manhood, true knight-errantry."

Saint James the Red was, despite himself, quite taken by the passion of the old man. And although he did not truly believe his companion to be Don Quijote de La Mancha, he said: "I gotta admit, you showed a lot of *machismo* when you whipped those Airachis. That takes real *cojones*."

"Ah," said Don Quijote, not grasping the words, but understanding their intent. "Then prove yourself a true man and an even nobler wizard by —"

Don Quijote did not finish his exhortation, for there now arose a roaring far greater even than that of the iron lion.

II, lxxiv, supplement E: Wherein Don Quijote faces the chariot of Apollo.

IN THE sky, brave Saint James!" shouted the knight. "Treachery from the very sky!"

"Helicopter!" cried Santiago.

"Helios, I agree, and I fear I know exactly what this means. Recall you, Saint James, that I only recently cursed Apollo for his unkindness to

us? He is here to take his vengeance, and we see above us his very chariot. Methinks I even glimpse a piece of the sun itself gazing as it were an eye to find us out." For, indeed, a shaft of light was sweeping the sky, and its gaze fell directly on them.

"We're dead," said Santiago.

"I fear you are right," Quoth Don Quijote sadly. "Even the strength of my arm can be no match against a very god. But together, Saint James? Could it be that Providence has brought us together to show that wizardry and knight-errantry sum up the souls of men? It could well be that we are meant to win this encounter against the pagan deity himself. Recall my words, and we shall rout the very prince of Olympus."

"Cojones," said Saint James.

"Have you no spell as before?"

"I'll give you a spell. Go like this." With that, Saint James the Red raised both hands above his head.

"Ah," said Don Quijote, "the Spell of Raised Palms. I have heard of it, but confess my ignorance of its power."

Said Saint James: "This here spell keeps us alive."

"Indeed," quoth the knight. "Invincibility! I once had a helm with much the same property."

As they spoke, the chariot of Apollo settled to the ground but a short distance from them, and Don Quijote girded his heart against the fear he felt of the fearsome thunder. The chariot had no steeds to draw it, which gave Don Quijote courage: for he believed that Apollo, himself uncertain of this battle's outcome, had left behind the mighty steeds of Olympus, that, should the god fail in conflict with the world's two mightiest mortals, the sacred steeds might not be taken as loot.

"Courage, Saint James. I sense our enemy is as anxious as we."

"Yeah?" said Santiago. "I'd always wondered about that."

Whereupon the sides of the great chariot opened, and there came forth, not Appolo, but several Moors dressed in like fashion to the ones Don Quijote had routed earlier. These, too, had stunted lances, headdresses like unto women's, and, further, they sported decorations of metal pineapples in crossing bands upon their chests. Seeing them, Don Quijote was filled with ire. Would it be, he considered, that the god mocks us? For here we stand ready to face him, and he elects to advance Moorish chattel

upon us. "Such insult!" quoth he to Saint James, but he did not drop his hands, fearing he would break the wizard's powerful spell.

The Moors advanced to face them directly, and Don Quijote could not help but smile, sorry for these fools that did not know they were already defeated by the knight's and wizard's invulnerability.

One of the Moors took the butt of his gnarled lance and stoutly rammed Saint James in the stomach. Saint James fell to the ground, uttering moans of discomfort.

"Well done!" quoth Don Quijote. "Seeing that these are simpletons sent to us as an insult, I see no reason not to make sport with them. Should they strike me, I, too, shall pretend to be injured. What laughs we shall have later tonight, Saint James!"

Then the Moor struck Don Quijote. True to his word, the knight fell to the sand, pretending to have been well smitten. After a moment, Don Quijote thought perhaps he was playing his own act far too well, for his gut seemed to burn from the pain he feigned. I act so well, he thought, that I should perhaps have been in theater, were theater not beneath the dignity of a knight-errant. He prepared to act even better should more blows fall upon him, but the Moors returned their attention to Saint James. They booted and beat and smote him often, and the wizard kept up his commendable performance to the point that Don Quijote himself would have believed the pain had he not known better.

But soon the knight tired of the playacting. "Come," he called to Saint James, "let's have done with these cretins and find worthier prey." With that, Don Quijote drew his sword and ran full into the closest Moor. He would have killed him, too, had the Moor not turned upon seeing the knight; as it was, there was only a slight wound to the shoulder, not at all fatal.

Hearing the commotion, the Moors who had been taking sport on Saint James now rushed to Don Quijote, waving their pathetic lances in his direction. Saint James saw them advance upon the knight, and he shouted, as best a beaten man could: "Leave him alone! He's just an old guy! Leave him alone!" But the Moors were, if anything, even more vicious in their beating of Don Quijote than they had been with Santiago.

Feeling pain, and now convinced that he had somehow botched the spell and that the pain was real, Don Quijote cried out: "Noble Saint James! I fear the enchanter Frestón has stopped my arms, with the intent

of having me leveled by these infidel Moors! The *machismo* and *cojones* for which you earlier praised me seem to have been silenced, and I fear it is your *cojones* alone that shall bring us victory!"

Santiago was sickened by the treatment of the old fool. Summoning his remaining powers and rising to his feet, he recalled the words of the knight in their earlier conversation; and counting himself as good as dead, he elected to at least die fighting for an honorable cause — the protection of his recent friend.

And then Santiago Rojas, in the elation of his own fear, remembered her: a girl in his tenth-grade class, Lucinda Rosario Dias of Tenth Avenue, the first girl he'd ever gone with under the old Stutson Street Bridge. It seemed to him a silly thought to be having at the very last moment in his life, but remembering that conquest empowered him to face *this* insane defeat. He nearly invoked her, the way the old man invoked his Dulcinea: "I am the servant of the finest, purest, and most exalted of all women, the incomparable Lucinda Rosario Dias of Tenth Avenue!"

He thought better of it. Without invocation, Santiago Rojas threw himself into the midst of the thrashing Moors in Don Quijote's defense.

Don Quijote saw this; and what he saw next amazed him more than any other demonstration of the wizard's powers. Saint James, whose ineffectual blows did little to deter the Moorish mob (for, understand, he was a man of magic and not of muscle), grabbed hold of one of the metal pineapples that crossed the enemy's chest. He made a strange yanking gesture with his hand, as if ripping the very soul from the heart of the Moor, although what he held was no soul, but a small pin of metal. Of a sudden the entire crowd dispersed with shouts of terror. The Moor whose pineapple had been yanked stood as if frozen, and he then began to scream and claw at his chest. Saint James the Red grabbed the man's waist, lifted him, and hurled the Moorish cretin into the body of Apollo's chariot. There were screams from inside, and again Don Quijote witnessed the scourge of the Holy Flame of God, all of the chariot consumed by Providence's wrath.

Don Quijote now saw Saint James outlined in fearsome countenance by the flames of the spell. Saint James grabbed the gnarled lance dropped by the soulless Moor and began by magic to spout killing fire from the lance's tip. And this was the last that Don Quijote saw before falling into unconsciousness, fading with the thought: "There is no one mightier than

Saint James the Red. See how easily he, but a wizard, has come to understand the calling of knight-errantry."

II, lxxiv, supplement F: In which our knight discovers the true nature of chivalry in the Sudûrabu.

DON QUIJOTE awoke to the ministrations of an attending maiden, and though she was to him a stranger, he said unto her: "This, then, is Heaven? For such attention from a maid so beautiful could not be an element of earth, save that woman be my own true Dulcinea."

The woman did not understand his language, nor did he grasp hers when she said, "Soldier! What's he saying?"

Then Don Quijote saw above him the figure of Saint James the Red. "He says thanks for taking care of him," quoth the wizard, although these words, too, made no sense to the knight.

"You can talk to him, soldier. Five minutes, no more."

"Yes ma'am."

"And, soldier?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Good work."

The maiden departed, and Santiago began to speak in a manner understandable to the knight-errant. "You were right!" he said. "I tell you, I've never felt like I did fighting against those Airachis. God damn, the sense of power! The sense of it being so . . . I dunno, so *right*!"

The knight was touched by the wizard's words, and also felt gratified that his grand theme had been made clear to Saint James. "I am pleased," said the knight. "But tell me, where are we? Have we sacked Paris?"

The wizard gave a jovial laugh. "No, no, old man, we're back with the U.S. Army. We took three days getting here. You know what? I even captured two prisoners, made 'em take turns carrying you. 'Course, I had to lie a bit to the brass, said I'd been grabbed by those two and taken hostage on this side of the border. God damn, I'm almost a hero here. The Airachis will contradict my story, but who believes a bunch of Airachis? 'Infidel Moors,' right?"

"Indeed," quoth Don Quijote, "and I am proud that you have rejoined your noble army. Tell me of that maiden, however. Your manner with her

was so meek and resigned. Could she perhaps be your one true beloved, and have I had the pleasure of meeting the damsel to whom your heart belongs, she who is to you as Dulcinea is to me?"

Don Quijote's sentiments seemed to baffle Saint James the Red. "You mean Clancey? She's head of the nurses. She outranks me, so I gotta be . . . uh, meek and resigned."

"What say you?" quoth Don Quijote. "The knights of your army bring their maidens onto the very fields of battle that they might benefit from feminine ministrations? This seems odd to me, Saint James, and quite unwholesome."

"Oh, they're not just nurses," said Saint James. "Women work in maintenance, supplies, even strategy if you go up a ways. They're a big part of the military. Just a matter of time till they're fighting right next to men."

"What!" bellowed Don Quijote in a voice that resounded through the hall in which he lay. "You mean to say that your chivalry allows the fairer sex to endanger themselves on the very field of battle? Outrage! Unthinkable! How can any band of knights hold in so low esteem the very flower of God's creation?"

"Hey," Quoth Santiago with a peculiar shrugging of his shoulders, "Equality and all that. I tell you, though, out there fighting, I never felt more like a man in my life."

It was then that Don Quijote felt his madness leaving him. "What for, all of this?" he said in a diminutive voice. "If fighting is for honor, and honor for the glory of the fairer sex, and here I find the fairer sex themselves involved in battle — wherefore, I ask you, is knight-errantry?"

"Man, I never felt stronger," quoth Saint James.

"Wherefore?" again quoth Don Quijote. "Know not these people that it is a far better thing for men to spill the guts of other men, and for women, far off and safe, to hold such deeds as noble? Alas, I find myself conceding: Frestón, oh wicked tongue of reality, perhaps you have cajoled me with more than lies. Perhaps you have cajoled me with truth, bitter, bitter, ugly truth!"

Just then Don Quijote heard again the voice of Frestón. "Enough," the enchanter said. "Thou hast learned well, Don Quijote, and thou hast learned bitterly. Fit it is, then, that thy bones should rest in the earth of thine own age. Hate me not for the evil thou perceiveth in me."

Behind the voice of Frestón, the knight-errant heard the voice of Saint James the Red, saying: "Can't wait. Can't wait till the next real fighting starts."¹²

And Don Quijote, passing through mist, found himself again in his own country and in his own bed. He awoke weeping for his lady Dulcinea, and declaring of his friends that knight-errantry be forever condemned, and demanding it never be spoken of again in his presence or in his household. And to them all, he declared: "I am Alonso Quijana — el Bueno."

An Afterword by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

SO WHAT is our verdict? Whom shall we praise? Don Quijote de La Mancha, in whose world men slay men, and women either cheer or weep from afar? Or Saint James the Red, whose men slay men, slay women, slay men and women? Or perhaps Don Alonso Quijana el Bueno, whose fantasies become unthinkable if the slaying isn't done just so, just right?

The afterlife has broadened my vision in many ways, but it has only strengthened my resolve: praise neither and none of these gentlemen. For if you praise them, then you, reader, are again the Don Quijote I tried so long ago to bury. You become the protagonist, the gallant knave, the kindly killer, the vicious fool.

Just once, I should think, we would try to praise a story's true hero. We would try to be Frestón.

I fear I shall rewrite this tale forever.

12. My interpretation is that Frestón was indeed confronting Don Quijote with truth. My brother agrees, although my dad has some reservations. My sister Cheryl only nods and reminds me of the meaning of cojones: both the symbol of male strength, and physiologically his greatest vulnerability. Although not an original insight, definitely a noteworthy one.





BOOKS

A L G I S B U D R Y S

The Wild Blue and The Gray, William Sanders, Warner, \$4.50

Universe 2, Robert Silverberg and Karen Haber, Editors, Bantam, \$21.50 hard, \$9.50 trade paperback

THINGS HAVE developed quickly for William Sanders, in the sense that it is only a few years since *Journey to Fusang*, his first novel, and here he is with *The Wild Blue and The Gray* plastered over with encomia — granted some of them are from this journal, and by me. Plenty of other people have chipped in. On the other hand, things have been *damned* slow.

To put a fine point on it, William Sanders is actually an old friend of mine — he helped me with *Michaelmas*, for instance, which is 1976 — and before then he was going nuts trying to get someone interested in what eventually became *Pockets of Resistance*, and writing books about folding canoes, which actually pay better than SF — and he is about as little of an overnight success as

you can imagine. His daughter is grown, and he and his wife have said to hell with it and moved to Talequah, Oklahoma, and gone to live with the Native Americans. (She being one.) Whence he writes me letters that make more sense than the letters he was sending me from Little Rock, so I presume the change has done him good.

Anyway, William Sanders is an American Original, being a redneck except that he was an English teacher and a Russian translator, raced bicycles, played professional-level folk guitar, rides a motorcycle and looks it, won't so much as get into a car, and in many other ways is the genuine article that many a young and not so young SF writer pretends to be. As a consequence, it will come as no surprise to you, if you think about it, that much of this is very difficult to guess just from reading a William Sanders book. He tends to write a pellucid style, and though he chooses peculiar milieux for his stories, he does not then write of them impressionistically; he just tells his

story. (Although, in *Journey to Fusang*, it is to be admitted that he cracked some outrageous puns, on several levels.)

The Wild Blue and The Gray is not as much given to japery — though it has its moments, he shows greater restraint. It is simply an aviation novel — a good aviation novel — about World War I, except that the forces allied to the British and French are the Confederate States of America, the Civil War having come out a bit differently in this time line. And the hero of this book is Amos Ninekiller, of the Cherokee Flying Corps, he having been named as such by his Chief and sent to be attached to the Confederate Air Force.

Other than that, the novel proceeds in pretty much of a straight line — well, there is a whorehouse named Dixie Land, run by a Miss Rhetticia Butler — and the airplanes, for instance, are exactly as they were, the Confederates flying Nieuport 17s and the Germans answering with Fokker monoplanes until they spring the Albatros on the unsuspecting allies. (True, the Nieuports are armed with the Travis machinegun, as distinguished from our Hotchkiss, but the Travis (A) uses many parts ripped off from the Hotchkiss and (B) is even more unreliable.)

(Incidentally, since I seem to be

in a parenthetical mood anyway, I commend the cover. It really is an unusually good painting, and the fact that the Confederate insignia are not as described in the book can be overlooked as artistic license. The artist seems to have actually researched not only the airplanes but the balloons, and then rendered them in an effective and deft style. Unfortunately, he is unnamed — art credit is given to GNEMO, which I assume is the name of an organization.)

The story has to do ostensibly with Amos Ninekiller's secret mission, and that is no more than sketched in. This book is not a particular success on that level. What it really has to do with is the waste and wanton murder of modern warfare, in which far too many men are sent directly into the mouths of machineguns for the sake of military theories that *never* worked.

But there are two things wrong with this as far as the book goes: (A) this had all been done before; not often better, but not worse, either, much of the time, and (B) that has nothing to do with the SF gimmick. The SF gimmick gets in its licks — for instance, with the killing of a Bavarian Corporal by Ninekiller as he and William Faulkner make their escape from behind German lines at one point. But as I said, the

main thrust of this book is the one about war, in general. For that, you do not have to introduce the idea of an alternate time line.

This is of course a shame, because the idea of a Confederate Air Force is one with undeniable appeal. (There actually *is* a Confederate Air Force, for those of you who don't know; if nothing else, keep your eyes peeled for a screen credit in many aviation movies, but that is in fact a minor part of the Air Force's activities.)

But I was saying that the idea of this book is a better one than the book is. Good as the book is. It's a little off the immediate point, but it seems to me the South's tradition of cavalry raids is rather neglected in this account, and I would like to see a regiment of Southrons getting hold of some tanks, and doing things with them that the stodgy British and French never dreamed of. (Sanders raises the possibility, but, even though he is in charge of the book, cannot bring himself to do it. Which tells you where his priorities lie.) Similarly, a fair number of Secesh troopers were still around in 1914, and I would have liked to have seen that . . . including some from the balloon-borne artillery observation corps, with the perhaps valuable comments they might have made to the Rebel balloon-busting heavier-than-air arm.

A peculiar character does appear in the book — Major Lucas, who replaces Colonel Culpepper as commander of the outfit, and immediately imposes his awareness of modern fighter plane tactics. He is as if a man sprung out of thin air. Where did he learn these tactics? Why do they all work at once (all but the balloon-busting ones). One day it's Colonel Culpepper, with his old-fashioned "knights of the air" ideas, and the next minute it's Lucas, with his "hammer 'em into the ground" philosophy and the tactics to do it with. Can Lucas actually be from our time, furthermore, from World War II? That would explain it, except that Sanders makes it clear that can't be it, at the same time he fails to explain Lucas by any other means.

What this is, I think, is a novel in which the author never really focussed on one thing. It has a lot of charms, and it's not a bad aviation novel by any means, but as an SF novel it's just ordinary. That's not something one says about a Sanders book usually, and I have complete confidence the next one will be back on track. But the most important single thing about this book is that it isn't *bad* — it isn't even just good. But its strengths lie in areas other than SF, and in those areas too many other writers have trod before. I guess what it is most of all is an interesting failure.

• • •

It's been a very long time since I reviewed an original anthology other than *L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of The Future*, and I apologize for that. It wasn't advertant — I just didn't think of it. Of course, the number of original anthologies is down considerably from what it was ten years ago.

But of that number, however many it may have been, the *Universe* series by Terry Carr was the most highly regarded. Now, I liked Terry — a lot — but I didn't agree with his choices in fiction, most of the time. I reviewed various one-shots of Terry's over the years, and his novel, *Cirque*, but I never reviewed a *Universe*, that I can recall. Well, Terry's dead some years now, and I among many others regret it deeply. Probably no one regrets it more than Bob Silverberg, though, and Bob and his wife, Karen Haber, have begun a new series of *Universes*. I have here *Universe 2*, which I do intend to review.

There are twenty-two stories in this selection, of which one is a portion of a novel, by Alex Jeffers. Jeffers is also represented by a short story. The other writers all make single appearances, and they are, in contents page order, Mark W. Tiedemann, Cary James, John K. Gibbons, Brian W. Aldiss, Deborah Wessell, Jeffers, John M. Landsberg, Barry N.

Malzberg, Sean McMullen, Tony Daniel, Joe Haldeman, Donna Fraley, Nicholas A. DiChario, Kathe Koja, Dirk Strasser, Paula May, Jonathan Lethem, Jamil Nasir, Lisa Mason, Jeffers again, Carolyn Gilman, and Lou Fisher.

The first thing you notice, I think, is the relative absence of old, familiar names. Aldiss, Malzberg and Haldeman are all that readily come to mind; and, begging everyone's pardon, while the Malzberg and the Aldiss are very interesting, and the Haldeman only slightly less so, none of the three is represented by a major piece.

The second thing you notice, if you're me, is a number of persons who were first brought to the world's attention by the *Writers of The Future Contest*: Paul May, Jamil Nasir, and Carolyn Gilman. To them, only if you're me,* ought to be added Kathe Koja, who was a finalist in the contest, long ago, and who did not win a prize only because the judges tend toward conservatism. Kathe Koja ought to be added on any excuse you care to come up with, and a mention made of her first novel, which Silverberg does not mention. (It was reviewed here, and her second almost certainly will be.)

Anyway, of this batch of four, I

* Which you're not. And, really, you ought to be damned glad of it.

like the Koja, the May, and the Nasir and the Gilman in that order, and the Gilman, for the sake of drawing a line in the sand, is good.

The best story in the book is probably the novel segment by Alex Jeffers; it has texture, nuance, a subtext, all that good stuff, and it is written with a command of the language that is unusually rich, although this book has other examples of strikingly good prose. What it does not have is a resolved plot, but that is what I was principally going to talk about, and so shall.

I, as it turns out, started to talk about this in connection with the Michael Swanwick collection some few issues back. And here it is again, only this time it's in a prestige anthology which presumably will set the tone for the next generation of writers. That is, very, very few of the stories here have a genuine beginning, middle and end. Generally speaking, they have a beginning, and it's practically impossible not to have a middle, but most of them just wink out after a time.

This is not true of "The Cool Equations" by Deborah Wessell, or of "Triad," by Lisa Mason. However, the one is a sort of joke that would be much better if it were not counterpoised to "The Cold Equations." It would have played beautifully under some other title; try it and see. And the other, though it is a good story,

is told in a manner best described as "high feverish," which — I don't know about you — puts me off. Most of the rest of these "stories" are not stories, by my definition; they're slices of life, including the so-called dissant Campbell story, "Waterworld," by John K. Gibbons.

Now, I hasten to add that most of them are good slices of life, most certainly including the Brian Aldiss, which is intended to be experimental from the outset. But I worry, perhaps needlessly, about a collection so prestigious, so careful is its selections, that seems to have found so few *stories* to put into itself.

It can only mean a relatively small number of things, the least likely of which is that there are no stories being written. There are, and there will continue to be. So we have to assume that the editors did not want stories.

Now, if that's a reflection of an existing trend, I don't see how I can cavil. If as it turns out none of the younger writers are writing stories as interesting as these slices of life, so be it — assuming that this new *Universe* series is largely devoted to young writers. Yet it doesn't seem to be; rather, the editors seem to have a tropism to this kind of fictional construct, and thus we get it as the result of deliberate editorial action. Which is strange — have I missed something, or do Haber (and most

particularly Silverberg] write stories, but actually in their heart of hearts consider the slice of life a higher form?

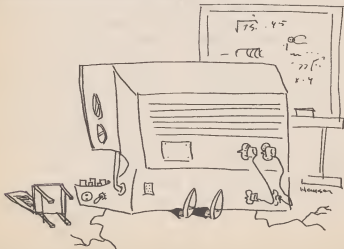
Which brings us not only to the Swanwick question — Are we prepared to make the audience smaller in exchange for some sort of perceived increase in quality? — but to a further question: Does Silverberg not like the kind of fiction he himself writes, and what does that mean?

And, of course, there's the pricing. Can Bantam really be serious about charging \$21.50 for the hardcover of this book? And \$9.50 for the trade paperback, with no mass market edition in sight?

It seems to me — but Lou Aronica of Bantam obviously doesn't see it

the same way — that you cannot charge \$21.50 for an anthology with only three "name" authors in it — and they, pardon me guys, not *the* top three names. It seems to me you cannot expect the trade paperback to carry this book. In other words, this is a loss leader, to my way of thinking. Strange. Strange; of all the books you could market in this slot, *Universe 2* seems least well served.

To my way of thinking, something went wrong here; very wrong. Of course, I may be wrong. But the only way I'll be wrong is if this sort of literature is the wave not only of the future but of the *buying* future. If it's the wave of the buying future, I'll shut up. And I won't even have to go away — the field will do it for me.



WILSON T. SMEDLING — A TRAGIC FOOTNOTE IN THE EARLY DESIGN OF LAPTOP COMPUTERS.

Books to Look For

BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

Mars, Ben Bova, Bantam, cloth, 502pp. \$20.00.

GOOD OLD-fashioned idea-oriented hard sf never needed characterization — characters only existed in order to discover ideas or figure out solutions to problems. The outcome of the story never depended on a character trait more complicated than wit and pluck, and so time spent developing character subtleties would have been wasted. This was not a flaw in hard science fiction — it was simply the nature of the beast.

But ever since the New Wave in the sixties, hard science fiction writers have been criticized for precisely that non-flaw. This is because so many new writers and critics, having been indoctrinated by the academic-literary establishment with the tenet that there is only one kind of good writing, were ardent proponents of the idea that no story that lacked characterization could be good. (Never mind that so many stories that *have* characterization are wretched; never

mind that our whole genre is founded on stories utterly lacking in characterization, and yet nevertheless this literature created an audience and a community and has endured rather well for sixty years.)

The result was that many hard-sf writers — like Adam and Eve, who never knew they were naked until somebody pointed it out to them — became convinced that if they were ever to be “good” writers they must “characterize.” Unfortunately, neither they nor their busybody critics understood what characterization was and what it was for. The result was a tedious array of hard sf stories that were interrupted for meaningless sex scenes or explorations of the character’s feelings, which would have been fine except that they had nothing whatsoever to do with the flow of events in the story.

I won’t list the hard-sf writers whose works have been marred by this tendency, first because the list consists of pretty much all of them, and second because they are more sinned against than sinning. Let us

simply say that these perfunctory attempts at characterization, far from improving hard science fiction, made it an embarrassment.

Yet, having said this, I must also point out that when characterization is used properly — that is, when the exploration of character is necessary in order to understand why things happen the way they do in the story — the entire process is greatly enriched. It doesn't become better "hard sf," but it becomes a fuller experience for the reader and brings more readers into the audience for the story. (The same enrichment process works in reverse, too. Whatever his intention, Bruce Sterling's Harder SF Movement of the mid-80s had the effect of inducing the writerly types to invest some effort in developing decent, intelligent ideas for their character- or style-oriented science fiction.) In other words, while characterization is not necessary for a hard-sf story and can be detrimental when it is not meaningfully connected to the events of the tale, a hard-sf story that is *also* a good character story can bring the values of both kinds of fiction to a wider audience. That, I think, is a Good Thing.

So, with that long preamble, let me tell you now about a Good Thing. In fact, one of the best things we've ever seen from the hard-sf ghetto.

Ben Bova has written a Mars novel. Indeed, I may even go out on a limb and say that Ben Bova has written *the* Mars novel. By hard-sf standards, one would expect the novel to be excellent no matter what — no one knows the current space program and what is likely to take place in the first Mars visit better than Bova. If that were *all* this novel was, then I could recommend it to the hard-sf audience and leave it at that.

But *Mars* is a lot more than just the definitive hard-sf extrapolation of the first human visit to Mars.

It is also — it is *primarily* — a wonderful character story about the people who form the tiny community that first explores the surface of Mars, and the people back on Earth whose decisions will decide what and how much they accomplish.

So if, like me, you're one of those readers whose eyes glaze over when you hear a book praised for its "technical accuracy" and "thorough exploration of state-of-the-art science," let me assure you: You won't even notice the science stuff except as essential and clearly-explained aspects of the people's lives.

And such people! Joanna Brumado, who is along on the voyage partly as a biologist, but mostly (or so people assume) because she is the

daughter of the deft Brazilian politician who has maneuvered for forty years to bring the Mars expedition to pass; Edith Elgin, an utterly believable on-air reporter for a cable news network, who is passionately in love with one of the astronauts — and quite willing to exploit her relationship with him to get the scoop of her career; the nasty, self-serving Austrian geologist who manages to provoke the rest of the crew-in-training to such a degree that they would rather be dropped from the voyage themselves than have to be confined in a spacecraft with him for a year-and-a-half round trip; the British medical officer whose cynical wit is only one of the lubricants he uses to help him get through an experience that terrifies him; the Russian pilot who is in command of the landing team and is determined that it will succeed by strictly following all the rules to the letter; the American vice-president who would gladly scuttle the whole expedition if that would give her some advantage in her maneuvering for her party's presidential nomination; the Chinese expedition commander, who will never set foot on Mars himself, and yet must take responsibility for sorting out the prickly and difficult personalities on the surface of Mars; the Israeli scientist who decides that one of her roles on the mission is to ease the sexual tension of all the

males — except the Russians, whom she loathes beyond reason.

Above all, this is the story of Jamie Waterman, a half-Navaho geologist who gets on the expedition as a last-minute replacement and then manages to antagonize just about everybody, even as he turns the whole expedition toward meeting his own agenda. He never means to cause trouble. He just gets enthusiastic sometimes . . .

Of course there are the standard sci-fi story questions: Do they find life? Will they live through the physically dangerous events? And I promise you that your sensawunda will be well and thoroughly tickled *without* ever sacrificing plausibility. *Mars* succeeds as scientific exploration, as an adventure story, as a mythic tale. But at every turn in the story, it absolutely depends on who these people are and how they function together as a community — and that, folks, is sufficiently rare in our little genre that it makes this book extraordinary.

I guess what I'm saying is — this is what hard-sf can be at its best. Not just a fiction of ideas or milieu, but also a fiction of character and of grand events. There is no standard by which *Mars* is not an excellent book — except, perhaps, to those who insist on a flamboyant style before fiction is considered "art." By that standard, Bova's prose is too

liquid, too clear; its asimovian purity never calls attention to itself. Of course, I think that's the highest praise one can give to a writer's style, but then I'm reviewing for *F&SF*, not the *New York Times*.

For many years Ben Bova was the dominant editor in the science fiction field, first with *Analog* and then with *Omni*. I'm far from being the only writer he discovered, and his impact as an editor is still being felt many years later. In the minds of many in the field he remains an editor first, a writer second — this despite his many dozens of novels and short stories, and despite the fact that it has been more years since he left editing than the whole careers of several award-winning young writers.

Mars is the novel that will establish Bova once and for all as a writer of premier science fiction. It is possible that *Mars* makes Bova the best of the hard-science-fiction writers. It is certain that *Mars* makes Bova one of the best science fiction writers of any kind. And you who nominate for awards — you cannot make an intelligent judgment of the science fiction of 1992 without having read this book.

As for the rest of us, we won't read *Mars* because it's a pivotal book in Bova's career or because it's one of the important novels of the year. We'll read this honking big book

because this kind of story is the reason science fiction exists in the first place.

After the King: Stories in Honor of J.R.R. Tolkien, Martin H. Greenberg, ed. (TOR, cloth, 456pp, \$24.95)

Martin Harry Greenberg is the quintessential science fiction anthologist — embodying the tradition of service to the field that has marked the best members of our community from the start. You never see him promoting himself, and he willingly effaces his own role behind the names of more famous fiction writers. But working steadily behind the scenes, he has caused dozens and dozens of original and reprint anthologies to come into existence, providing avenues for short fiction to reach a wider audience — and, along the way, getting many a writer to produce a wonderful short story or novelet or novella that would never otherwise have existed. (I know from experience — I've collaborated with him on several anthologies, and for other anthologies he has squeezed two stories out of me that are among those I'm most proud of in my career.)

In recent years, Greenberg has put together three festschrift anthologies. The first two, *Foundation's Friends* and *October's Friends* were in honor of, respectively, Isaac Asimov

and Ray Bradbury. For both of these previous anthologies, other authors were permitted to set stories in the honored author's private universes. With *After the King*, there was not quite the same freedom, in large part, I suspect, because the author was not alive to give his permission, and Tolkien's family is (quite properly, I think) very protective of his works and worlds. Thus you won't be reading stories about Aragorn or Samwise after the end of *Lord of the Rings*. But what you *can* read are excellent fantasy stories by some of the finest writers in the field, written in honor of the man whose work created the audience for today's commercial genre of fantasy.

And, in case you haven't noticed it, let me point out that excellent high fantasy short fiction is rare as dragon's teeth these days. There are a few good outlets for blood-and-thunder sword-and-sorcery, and lots of places where you can find urban fantasy or contemporary horror. But in between fairy tales by Jane Yolen you can go a long time without seeing high fantasy in the Tolkien tradition in the magazines and original anthologies. Instead, high fantasy seems to have become almost exclusively a novel-centered genre. There are good reasons for that, of course — for one thing, it can take a lot of pages to create a convincing society.

But *After the King* will remind you of something that Tolkien himself proved with *Smith of Wooten Major*, *Leaf by Niggle*, and *Farmer Giles of Ham* — you can sometimes say as much in a few pages of fantasy as in a thousand.

So it is you can revel in Charles de Lint's wistful "Conjure Man," in which a young woman of our time gets caught up in the projects of a street person who was once one of the giants in the earth; the tale affirming the importance of Tolkien's work in our world in a way that no mere essay ever could.

Or try John Brunner's "In the Season of the Dressing of the Wells," a powerful story of a young Englishman recovering from the injuries, both physical and spiritual, that he suffered in World War I; he finds his salvation in helping his local village do proper homage to the ancient gods of the island, despite the interference of his vindictively Christian aunt.

Or journey along with four women who have been sent forth by their queen in search of the harper whom she loves. In Patricia McKillip's "The Fellowship of the Dragon," the women are sent because the queen can't trust the jealous men of the court not to kill the harper themselves when they find him. But the women, too, can have agendas of their own in a tale as

surprising and wryly truthful as we have come to expect from McKillip.

Or look at "The Naga," by Peter S. Beagle, than whom there is no better fantasist alive. The layered structure of a tale within a tale within a tale harks back to an earlier era of storytelling, but the story is a timeless myth of true love and true marriage — it is possible to write operatic stories even in our cynical age.

And, of course, there is (there *must* be) a story by Jane Yolen, one of the best of her darkish fairy tales, in which a boy is born to be "Winter's King" and spends his childhood searching for the place where he belongs, even as the normal world of men and women thinks it knows exactly who and what he is.

Yolen also wrote the introduction to the anthology; you'll find other fine tales by Donaldson, Pratchett, Silverberg, Scarborough, the Andersons (not Hans, but Poul and Karen), Turtledove, McKiernan, Bull, Haber, Resnick, Malzberg, Benford, and Tarr. And when you're through with these tales, you may just decide to pull out your old copy of *Lord of the Rings* and read again the work that started it all for this generation of fantasists.

Flying in Place, Susan Palwick, (TOR, cloth, 192pp, \$16.95)

a short story writer of surpassing excellence — it seems that the shorter her tale, the better it is. I first came to know her work with her poem "The Neighbor's Wife," which packed into a few lines more story, more character, more myth than most writers can fit into a novella.

But that's no guarantee that Palwick can handle herself at novel length, and in fact at the start of *Flying in Place* there is cause for concern, as the story focuses with relentless single-mindedness on a single aspect of the teenage narrator's life: her father's continuing sexual abuse and her flight-of-fancy escape from it in an imaginary ability to leave her body and fly. While it is true that sexual abuse is so terrible an experience that all the rest of the victim's life seems to take shape around it, that very singularity can make reading a story about it quite unpleasant without adding any illumination. A good novelist can balance the central core of the story with many digressions that enrich the world of the tale and provide the reader with balance and insight and perspective beyond the essay-like central theme. For the first chapter or so, however, it seemed that Palwick was writing, not as a novelist, but as a short story writer, and therefore there would be no remission: we would be pounded with the theme

Susan Palwick has been, till now,

until we were driven entirely out of the tale.

To my relief, however, it is not terribly far into the book before Palwick the novelist claws her way to the surface and elbows Palwick the short story writer aside. The result is that the narrator finally leads us into a wider world in which not everything is the servant of a single motif. Thus we are able to receive *Flying in Place* as a bitter-sweet novel of a dead sister who returns to give our narrator the tools she needs to break her family out of the poisonous pattern that is consuming them all. Along the way we meet a wonderful neighbor family whose chaotic happiness is a refuge for the narrator; an aunt whose existence the narrator never knew of, and yet who holds a secret that might help to save her; and, above all, we meet the dead sister, whose flights with the narrator through time and space are far more than mere escape.

If, by the end, there is any flaw remaining, it is in the character of the abusive father. Monsters are very

hard to write plausibly — for every Arslan there are a thousand Simon Legrees, and the father in Palwick's tale, while he is believable enough along the way, suddenly becomes a tool of the plot near the climax, when, after spending years manipulating people brilliantly through lies and guilt, he suddenly turns stupid and violent. Perhaps it happens that way in real life, but we had little preparation for the idea that this was possible in his character, and so it felt like the ending of so many almost-good movies, when powerful character relationships are suddenly reduced to violent confrontations.

Never mind my nit-picking. I wish my first novel had had no more serious flaws than these; the rest of the story is so beautifully handled that I doubt many readers will be troubled by these minor issues. Instead *Flying in Place* is a wonderful debut for a writer who has proved she can write well in long forms as well as short ones — may it be the first of many novels from Palwick, each one better than the ones before.



Kit Reed has published twenty novels and short story collections. Her most recent novel, Catholic Girls, appeared last year, and her how-to-write book, Story First, is going into a new edition. She teaches writing courses at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. Her latest story in F&SF is an odd little tale about a man who has become a slave to his VCR . . .

Tapeworm

By Kit Reed

IF ONLY HE can get it right, life will be perfect; he has the will, and if things work out right he will find the perfect woman to fit in his arrangements, over there in the circle chair next to the window, facing the microspeakers and the Advent screen. A few caresses, a little wine; when he and the woman in question are ready, he will press Play and everything will unfold.

A place for everything, right, Jeffrey Hawthorne, and everything in its place; his apartment is brilliant! It takes all his earnings to support this, but to get what he wants, Jeffrey needs the best. His voice is a fine instrument; the man has golden pipes. His admirers say, "You ought to be in radio." He works long and hard, seducing, winning, storming prospective

customers for Fizico over the telephone. Without leaving the comfort of his apartment he makes money selling shares in Texas oil wells he's never seen to people he doesn't know for employers he's never met on a commission basis, and all in his spare time. The rest he devotes to culture, as he's about to prove.

Putting on the earphones he moves thousands of shares every night, and except for one or two bad moments, like the one yesterday, his path is hard but smooth. Although Mr. Benjamin Feeney's demographics put him solidly in the customer bracket, he was furious at being called.

"You mean you want to *sell* me something?"

"Sir, I'm trying to do you a favor."

His angry growl came up from somewhere deep. "Get out of my life!"

"But sir." The rest Jeffrey will not repeat. It was humiliating. For a minute there he thought the man was going to crawl right through the telephone and tear his golden throat right out of him, but never mind. Jeffrey has put a little tick next to Feeney's name in the Manhattan directory for a follow-up.

I touched a chord somewhere, he tells himself.

He's a wizard on the telephone — witness the beautiful woman he's lured to his apartment with a few inspired words played on the sweetest instrument in the world and relayed to her by NYNEX, courtesy of Ma Bell. Here comes Suzy Taylor, who thinks (thanks) / thought there might be a place for her in his arrangements. Jeffrey's a good-looking guy, as per the three-by-five photo on the back of his correspondence cards. He's steady; he works hard; on the phone he has a smoky, sexy charm that could lure birds from the trees or rabbits out of their holes. So here's Suzy Taylor in the doorway, with Jeffrey standing back because she's filled the room with bright hair, flying scarves, the smell of fresh wind and autumn smoke and she's already thinking: This guy needs help.

"You're much cuter than your picture," she says. "Is this your *place*?"

He gulps. "Come in."

"Where did you get all these *things*?"

She's bright, lovely; he is slightly uncomfortable because two's a crowd in this place, but like the tree in the quad he needs an audience. "Look," he says proudly.

Suzy looks: Multiple television screens, including a huge Advent with back projection for extra-big images. Four VCRs. Tape decks and CD

players. Three PCs complete with color monitors and modems wired to three different phone lines plus a laptop, everything basically within arm's length. And listen, he is highly regarded on the best bulletin boards; his computers are sending and receiving while Jeffrey goes on with the business of putting bread into his mouth. And if the exigencies keep him from leading life to the fullest, well, "There's world enough," he says to Suzy Taylor with the smug charm of a man who knows he's quoting the Bard. "And time." He is after all a cultivated man.

Taking one look into the apartment, tight as a ship's cabin, she despairs. "There's room for only one. Maybe we'd better go to my place," she says.

But he isn't listening. "This'll take only a minute." Something's come up on one of his screens.

Understand he is by no means exclusively a hacker, locked into the analog mode. Jeffrey's an intellectual. He's a certified member of Mensa and he loves doing their puzzles; if Suzy's doubtful, he can show her his card. He also knows a lot about art; look at his collection of catalogs from shows at the Metropolitan Museum and the National Gallery and the Whitney and a dozen others, all ranged stack on stack on the neat wall of shelves in the little bedroom, some of them still shrink-wrapped. He has postcards of the world's greatest masterpieces sorted in Baggies according to country and period, and underneath the bed there is a pullout drawer for his vast collection of posters with art reproductions, all laid flat to prevent bending or rolling — listen, these things are valuable. If he can ever get her to the bedroom. Unfortunately, Suzy's just left.

"And this is the one-winged Guyana Biplane," he was saying when she got up abruptly. They were knee to knee on the sofa and she'd suggested for the third time that they go over to her place.

"But wait, I'm showing you my *things*."

"Your things can wait." She was running her fingers along the inside of his wrist. "Let's go."

How to explain to her about his responsibilities, about the pressure? He was surprised by a little sob in his voice. "We can't."

"We can do anything we want to," she said.

"I have to see to *Aïda* on PBS," he said urgently. "It comes on seconds after I finish getting George Plimpton lecturing."

She whipped her head around and studied him. "You mean you're

taping?"

He said generously, "If you want to help me you can." How to make her see how important this is? "Suzy! It's live from the Met."

Instead of being impressed, she said crossly, "If you want to see *Aïda*, why don't you just go?"

"I can't." Tears stood in his eyes. "There's too much to do. Entering everything. Changing tapes. Making sure it's all there." Her expression changed so quickly it frightened him, so maybe he had explained too much. "The thing is, they're also doing *Silas Marner* on Arts tonight."

"Then we'd better go to my place," she said. "After all, you've got four VCRs."

"One's already taping Shakespeare. The others are for backup." Tears of frustration threatened but he swallowed them; he tried to tell her. "I have fifteen hundred hours on tape."

Heaven help him, she leaned close, all vivid scarves and sweet perfume. "And when do you expect to watch?"

"Not yet. Not now. Later." Every fiber in him was trembling. The pressure was enormous; he couldn't help it if in his enthusiasm he let it explode into the room with them, crowding her out. "Later, when I have it all!"

To his astonishment she whirled up in a bright cloud and snapped, "You think you're so smart. You don't know anything!" In the next second she was gone.

Now this is not true. Jeffrey is a conscientious and tireless intellectual; he has ordered the Time-Life videotape series on every single available war and all the tapes about ancient civilizations, and he's taped every last one of the nature shows on PBS, along with a lifetime supply of documentaries on exotic spots. He also loves drama, especially Shakespeare, and if he can possibly help it, he never misses a play. Look at them all lined up on the shelves — his collection. Plays, operas, silent-movie classics he's never watched but knows he's supposed to like. There is also his love for music; he has tapes of the best renditions of all the greatest masterworks. Look at all those taped versions of Metropolitan Opera, rank on rank, to say nothing of the audiotapes. Only a true admirer of the arts would have a collection like this.

This is the tape library of a civilized man with a deep appreciation for the finer things. Every one of his tapes has its own matching computer

entry with *when* and *where* taped along with a brief description; it takes him hours. Then there are the audios; everything important that he's ever taped off the air. There they are, rank on rank, neatly labeled and indexed and stored in alphabetical order; he is on his way to owning all the recognized classics of the civilized world. He loves learning, and when he gets a minute he's going to start at the beginning and play all his audiotapes and watch his videotapes right straight through until he's finished, every single one.

Nobody is going to accuse anybody with his collection of being flighty, or superficial. The man is deep.

His technology is the best. With the exception of the Advent screen and the bathroom TV, everything is neatly stashed in the entertainment module, a tight phalanx of electronics marshaled to protect Jeffrey Hawthorne from the march of the unworthy. His systems are amazing: clothes, tapes, electronics come in by mail order; he has laundry and food and a little white wine delivered by small businesses in the neighborhood (yes, he pays too much); trash removal right outside his door; by arrangement the super brings up his mail, which is profuse (the rundown of his pen pals is another story; that will have to wait until Suzy sees the error of her ways and comes creeping back to apologize). Jeffrey has prepared himself for almost every contingency. Unless he slips a disk or needs an emergency appendectomy, Jeffrey Hawthorne is self-contained and the ruler of his own world here. He's fixed it so he'll never have to go out. His equipment is the best.

And his needs? A clean tape. A fair star to steer her by. A woman to share his perfect life?

He should feel worse about Suzy but he has *things* to do.

Tonight he has to tape the nature show on PBS on Channel 24 (it's about gibbons and macaques), and it's particularly important to tape the Flying Karamazovs doing Shakespeare in Collision on the other educational channel on his second VCR because the last time he tried to tape it something went wrong with his backup VCR, which is not a Sony, but a cheap American knockoff and he lost the entire third act. There's Masterpiece Theatre on the other educational channel, and of course the opera on PBS, on the primo VCR because the supreme cultural experience deserves the best technology. Mustn't forget his duties to the radio: all those audiotapes he has to make; there's an experimental musician on at

5:00 A.M., when he desperately hopes to be sleeping, and there's the analysis of the news and once he gets everything punched in correctly and double-checked, he has to get to work.

Benjamin Feeney is preying on his mind. In spite of the fact that Jeffrey left Feeney his phone number in case he reconsidered, the man has not called him back. Furthermore there's the insult. Nobody talks to Jeffrey that way; he is after all the man with the golden pipes. That language! The gross grammar was harder to take than the obscenities. Like any worthy and certified member of Mensa, Jeffrey hates a failure. If he can't outcharm Feeney, he is going to have to outsmart him.

Sitting down at his desk with the phone book on one side and the Fizico terminal on the other so he can enter orders as he takes them, he begins the night's work. But first he has to make a call.

"Suzy, I want us to start over."

"You have to get rid of some of those *things*," she says.

He sighs. "If you loved me you'd understand."

"No. You would," she says.

Shrugging, he puts on the earphones and sells a couple of thousand shares to a nice little old lady just to warm up. Then he puts Feeney's number on the autodial and begins.

The first time Feeney answers, Jeffrey begins brightly: "Oh hello Mr. Feeney. I've been waiting to hear from you."

The man's angry voice rumbles into the phone like a tank convoy. "You— what?"

"Fizico doesn't want you to miss out on your big chance. Now if you'll just listen. . . ."

"No, you listen. I was just sitting here quietly, in the privacy of my own home. . . ." In seconds Feeney escalates and Jeffrey's afraid his earphones are going to melt before the outraged Feeney finishes his tirade and hangs up.

Smarting, Jeffrey tries a new tack on the second call. "Sir, I think there's been a little misunderstanding."

Feeney begins. "Listen, asshole, stay out of my home!" The rest is worse.

On the next call, Jeffrey tries: "Listen. You're being rude."

The next: "Please don't talk to me like that."

The next: "You can't talk to a member of Mensa that way."

Feeney lets him have it: *thock*. "I'll member-of-Mensa you, you pontificating asshole."

"Oh, don't hang up." Clank. Still, there's hope. If the man really wanted to shut off dialogue, he'd leave his phone off the hook.

Shaken as he is and on the verge of becoming disheartened, he resumes brightly: "Hellow Mr. Feeney. I know language like that is not an act of aggression; I know it's really only a cry for help."

Feeney explodes. "Call me one more time and I'm going to find you and murder you."

Jeffrey's been taught what to do when this comes up. "For our protection all Fizico representatives remain anonymous. Now if you'll just let me outline our options. . . ."

"Remember, I have your phone number," Feeney snarls.

"Exactly! Please be in touch."

"I'm warning you. . . ." Exploding in a galaxy of curses, Feeney hangs up.

If only I can keep him talking, Jeffrey thinks. Hopefully, he redials. "We were talking about options."

"I'm coming to get you," Feeney roars.

When he calls Feeney back this time, Jeffrey is somewhat daunted to discover that nobody answers. The phone just rings and rings, as if there were nobody there.

What if he's really on his way over? What if he's big? Feeney is clearly not a member of Mensa, but what if he belongs to Jack LaLanne? Even if he is dangerous, Jeffrey is protected; none of the Fizico customers know where he lives. Forget it. No way. Impossible. Still, Jeffrey's too shaken to continue work. Instead he calls Suzy but the conversation founders; his machines have picked up bad vibes from the Feeney calls and they begin to malfunction so he has to keep putting her on hold to change tapes.

Suzy says angrily, "Those things matter more to you than real life."

"This is life," he begins and then corrects himself. "No." He gets breathless with significance. "Art." He's only slightly embarrassed by what he's just said.

When she hangs up, the phone rings twice in quick succession.

"I know where you are, asshole." Feeney's voice thunders into the room. "I'm going to fix it so you'll never bother anybody again."

Next Suzy's voice fills his ear. "You have to save your own life, Jeffrey. Quick. Get off the phone and *pull out all your plugs*."

So for the first time he feels a little flicker of apprehension. What if Suzy breaks into his apartment right in the middle of the Vienna Symphony doing Beethoven, and starts disconnecting things? It's O.K., he tells himself; no matter. Every machine has a battery auxiliary. He's a world unto himself here, self-contained and proof against any eventuality. Listen, out there. Not for nothing is Jeffrey Hawthorne a cultivated man who just happens to be a member of Mensa. He is prepared.

He's even prepared for the fury of Benjamin Feeney, who starts hammering on his apartment door with some blunt instrument seconds after he gets off the phone. That fierce voice carries even through the door.

Very well, Jeffrey thinks grimly. Prepared. At the sound of Feeney's crowbar sliding along the cracks to get purchase, Jeffrey moves his fingers along the buttons of the master remote so that, when Feeney smashes the door open and rampages into the room, shouting, he is confronted by the best of Western civilization, all Jeffrey's forces rallied against the intruder: Bach playing on one tape deck, Beethoven on another, Billy Graham preaching on one television screen and George Plimpton lecturing on another while on the thirty-four-inch TV, images ripple and flicker: *Koyonnasquatsqui*. Take that, crude, angry Benjamin Feeney. Take that. And that. And that.

"Invade my privacy," Feeney shouts, raising the crowbar in an experimental swing. "Co-opt my telephone. Take that."

But Jeffrey just sits there in his best leather chair in his tweed coat with the suede elbow patches with his fingers playing over the remote: relaxed-looking member of Mensa, the ultimate civilized man; and seeing that Feeney's skidded to a stop, taken aback by the multitude of images, he hits the button that controls the VCR feeding the giant Advent and unleashes his heavy artillery. Alistair Cooke springs into being on the enormous Advent screen, even more cultivated than Jeffrey and bigger than Feeney himself, and if a third living figure enters this morass of images, the two men are too impassioned to see.

"Son of a bitch," Feeney says.

On the big screen, Alistair Cooke leans forward with a gentle, commanding manner that Jeffrey has mastered. Quiet here. We are in the presence of Culture.

"Please," Jeffrey says in a voice of command. "This is 'Masterpiece

Theatre,' so please watch your language please."

Feeney hesitates for only a moment. "I'll watch my language you. Make my life a living hell, will you." He prepares to lunge.

Madly, Jeffrey pushes all his buttons, sees that all his equipment is already in play and in a fit of desperation begins humming Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

So it is Suzy, not the march of culture, that saves him, Suzy Taylor, who likes Jeffrey, rather, and who has inserted herself between him and the attacking Feeney, gripping the surprised visitor's upper arms. "Please don't. He can't help it."

Feeney fizzes, "Got— to— get— him— off— my—"

"Really. He doesn't know."

"Back!"

"Shh. All right. Don't worry," Suzy says, removing the crowbar from startled Feeney's right hand and easing him out the door. And, "Listen," she says in a voice that strikes Jeffrey cold. "You won't be hearing from Jeffrey Hawthorne anymore. I'm taking care of it."

"What. . . ."

She gives Feeney a final push; she turns to steel. "I said, *I'm taking care of it.*"

When she closes the door on Feeney and turns around, Jeffrey's on his feet; he's flapping and overlapping his arms and legs protectively like a Rubens nude who's trying to cover everything at once. Giddy and frightened, he asks, "What are you going to do?"

"Shh," she says, pushing him down. "Sit tight. Nothing. Nothing that matters."

Like a tarantula seduced by a tarantula hawk, he is both delighted and frightened, fascinated and horrified. He watches her open her shoulder bag; what if she's reaching for another crowbar? "You're not going to hurt any of my equipment."

"Shh. No."

"And you're not going to take anything away."

"Nothing that matters." She pulls it out — an innocuous-looking object. To anyone who doesn't know its powers. "Now shh, relax. Lie back and wait. I'm going to make you free."

By this time he understands what she is about and knows at the same time that destructive as this act is, complete and terrifying, it is strangely

delicious. He supposes it's like kinky sex— feels both good and bad at the same time. The last time he felt like this was when he was six and his mother pulled out a baby tooth that had been hanging by three threads.

Deliberate and thorough, she's moving the object along row after row after row of tapes and when she's done that she quite simply grazes the various computers. When she's finished, every tape and every computer RAM is like the mind of a baby, shimmering with promise and completely blank.

"There," she says, turning to Jeffrey with a look of triumph. "That wasn't so bad, was it?"

With her electromagnet, she has erased them, Shakespeare and Verdi and Bach and Billy Graham alike, all tapes, audio and video, and everything stored on every one of his hard disks and floppies. It's gone. In one sweep she has erased everything he knows.

"Now you don't have to do that anymore."

He is beyond speech.

"It's O.K." she says, sliding into his lap. "Look, darling, it's still all there. Your tapes are still on the shelves with their neat little labels; you still have all your index cards. Look," she says because his pupils are spinning; she can see how fast his mind is whirring. "It's as if you still have everything. Everybody can see how hard you've worked but you don't have to keep taping and you never have to watch. It's a whole new world out there!"

The sexual rush that came with the erasure had begun to fade and not all her snuggling and sweet words will bring it back. Jeffrey sinks deeper into himself.

"Later," Suzy says, "you're going to look back on this and thank me. Now let's you and me get started."

"Yes, I have to get started."

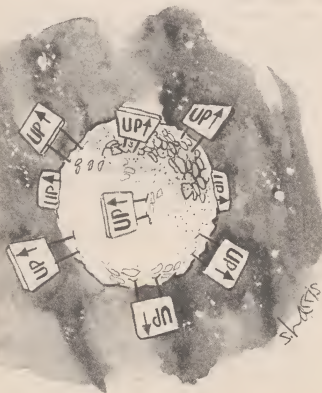
"Oh darling. There's nothing like a fresh start."

He stands abruptly, dumping her off his lap. "I can still get the last act of the opera and I'm not too late for the Monteverdi on the radio."

"Good-bye, Jeffrey," his liberator says, even though she doesn't mean it. It's only a threat, to bring him to his senses. But before Suzy can say or do anything more— Lord, start hurting his equipment— he has her firmly by the shoulders and he's rushing her out the door.

"In a way," he says, "I suppose I ought to thank you. I love you, and

you're absolutely right." He's looking at her but his mind is already scurrying ahead to the plays he can collect for the second time, no more scouring the schedules looking for new productions. The reruns of old operas, the lectures — he has world enough and time *and all these blank tapes*. With a little kiss he shuts the door on her, saying for her, for him, for all those unseen performers out there in the dark just waiting to be recorded, "There's nothing like a fresh start."



Rick Wilber's short fiction has appeared in *Analog*, Asimov's, *Pulphouse*, and the anthologies *Alien Sex* and *A Whisper of Blood*, both edited by Ellen Datlow. Last year, Rick co-edited an anthology of Florida-themed science fiction by Florida writers called *Subtropical Speculations* (released in hardcover by Pineapple Press). He teaches journalism at the University of South Florida in Tampa, and edits *Fiction Quarterly*, the *Tampa Tribune's* short-story and poetry supplement. "Calculating Love" is a science fiction story about sex, obsession, and the future.

Calculating Love

By Rick Wilber

I

IT'S FRIDAY, AND Daryl is on his way to Spanky's to celebrate the day's success over a few beers with the guys. They reached break-even today, and it'll be ignition next; Daryl is sure of it.

Their magnetic bottle held a sun today. Held it, contained it, harnessed it. And Daryl's brilliance, his design work, has saved millions for the plasma-physics lab at the university, has made the whole effort possible, made it all happen. He's twenty-seven and brilliant and a tamer of suns.

So he's happy, halfway across the interstate bridge over the bay, happy and anxious to talk it all down with Tommy and Clark. God knows they've earned a little celebrating, the three of them.

But traffic is a mess, moving slowly. First there was a messy accident right where the bridge narrows and leaves the landfull portion of its path across the bay. A sports car was totaled, looked like it had rolled and then come to rest

halfway over the small restraining rail. Somebody couldn't handle it, Daryl thought as he drove by. Too much car for the driver, things going too fast, lanes narrowing, and that was that.

Two cop cars blocked that side of the road, so traffic filtered through the one open lane. The ambulance guys were there as Daryl drove by. A fire truck was hosing things down. There was blood on the road.

Now, no more than a half-mile later, the rains have come, a blinding summer thunderstorm that has Daryl concentrating on his driving, moving slowly, glad the new candy-apple-red Celica handles so well on the puddled road. All he can really see clearly are the taillights of the pickup truck in front of him and, dimly, a car — a gray Porsche, he thinks — that has suddenly come up on him to his left, over in the fast lane.

Daryl normally looks into cars as they pass him by. The driver might be pretty, and she might look back. She might smile, might speak, mouth-ing words he wouldn't even need to hear through the glass and the road roar and the wind. It could happen. Daryl's not afraid to dream.

But the Celica has only two thousand miles on it, and cost him most of this year's raise and bonus, and he's nervous in the rainstorm, two hands on the wheel at ten o'clock and two, speed at maybe thirty. Damn this bridge, with its narrow lanes and no shoulders. People die out here all the time, he thinks. Like that sports car back on the other side. He keeps his eyes on the road.

But then the Porsche edges forward a bit, and he can't help himself, and despite the danger, he does it, takes a quick look.

She's a blonde, tousled postcoital look to her hair, achingly pretty face with full lips, high cheekbones, wide oval eyes that look back at him through the rain. He gets all this in less than a second, one quick look. Then, when he's about to turn his eyes away, she turns to look at him, smiles — a coy, slight upturn at the edges of that lipsticked mouth, a wrinkling at the edges of the eyes, a lifting at those cheekbones — and then she looks back at the road, steps on it a bit, and the Porsche pulls easily away, ignoring the rain and the slick road.

Daryl is stunned, shakes his head as the taillights disappear into the gray of the downpour. He wonders if it really happened at all or if his fantasies are getting the best of him.

Damn. And it's all over in a few seconds, almost like the magnetic bottle. It exists for a fraction of time and then is gone. All potential, un-

limited future, and then gone. That smile was a killer.

There was someone else in the car, another woman, Daryl slowly realizes as he looks back to his job of driving in the slow lane and thinks about the moment. Her seat was pushed back; she must have been sleeping. Daryl almost hadn't seen her at all, realizes she was there only as he analyzes what just happened.

Daryl shakes his head, then feels the Celica slide right a foot or two as he hits a puddled groove in the concrete and planes on it. He feels fear for a second in his gut, like a punch. He's not brave, never has been. His heartbeat shoots up, and the Celica slides more to the right, inches away from the right-side rail and a nasty scrape at the least, a drop down into the bay and death at the worst.

But he steers it back, easing off the gas, staying off the brakes, getting it back under control just like you're supposed to. Mechanical things have always come to him like that, always under smooth control. From his childhood toyings with kit computers to this morning's work with the Compact Mirror Test Facility, Daryl has always understood, always harmonized with, the world of machines. He understands them, gets along with them, knows how to please them. He loves them, really.

It's women that he can't seem to fathom.

He shakes his head, blows some breath through pursed lips. What a smile that was. And the way she looked. And looked back.

He loses himself in a fantasy about it, gets hard and has to shift in the driver's seat and rearrange things as the bridge finally ends and the road opens wider and the rain eases off and then drizzles to a stop; and it's going to be Friday night at Spanky's, meeting Tommy and Clark and eyeing the girls and seeing what comes up and celebrating the bottle. Ignition, self-sustaining fusion. They're almost there. They've almost got it. The future.

II

HE GETS to Spanky's, pulls into the parking lot, can hear the bass from the band pounding away as he slides the candy-apple red up and down the rows looking for a space. He winds up parking over near the Publix grocery store, at least a hundred yards from Spanky's. The place must be packed.

He puts it into park, tugs on the hand brake, hits the seat-belt button,

and gets out, closes the door, carefully locks it from the outside with the key so he couldn't possibly forget the keys in the ignition, then turns to head in.

And there, four spaces away, is the gray Porsche, still wet from the rain. She's here.

Sweet Jesus, he thinks, and he almost feels faint. His left knee starts to shake on him as he stands there in the lot, weakening like it does when he has to give a presentation to the visiting military types at the lab.

Daryl has never been sure why he doesn't do well with women. He's not bad-looking, nearly six feet tall, pleasant face, thin. His voice is a little high, maybe, and the glasses don't help, maybe, and, O.K., he's never been a jock.

But he's a nice guy, even proud of being a nice guy, and he's polite and reads the right magazines and books when he has the time, and watches the right movies, too, sometimes.

The girls, though, have never gone for him. Not in high school, when he and the other calculators were scooping up their A's while the quarterbacks and hot-shooting guards and fastball pitchers were getting all the dates.

Not in college, where the only girl who was a civil-engineering major was a knockout blonde who picked from the top, not from the bottom. Not in grad school, not in postgrad. And not now, either, where the lab has its share of pretty women on the design team, and a good supply of overly made-up secretaries, but none of them, not one, knows Daryl exists as a person. He is, to all of them, still just a calculator, a cruncher. The best, maybe, brilliant in his way. But still just another calculator.

But he keeps trying; he's never been a quitter. And he's going to click one of these days — fantasy turned real. He's going to click, and the first time will be warm and wild and wonderful. And she smiled at him through the rain. Sweet Jesus, that smile.

He walks across the parking lot, up to the bronze door with the raised outline of Spanky and Alfalfa on it, adjusts his glasses up tight against the bridge of his nose, runs his hand through his thinning hair, tugs the door open, and walks in.

Packed, like he figured. But there're Tommy and Clark, waving at him already. Tommy, that fat belly straining the buttons on his shirt, holds

up a Mich Dry and laughs, glad to see him. Clark, the skinny runner of the three, the marathon man, holds his up, too. They're happy, they've got a right to be. Today was a big day. What a success, incredible.

They'd like to tell the world about it, scream it out, claim their fame. But of course they won't, can't. It's all too secure for that. Too many people in this race, too many people interested for the wrong reasons. So nobody from the outside gets to know yet; nobody possibly could. And the three of them will just have to keep their little secret for a while longer, that's all. But they plan to celebrate it anyway. No harm in that.

They're a team, these three. Tommy and Clark seem to know what Daryl wants from them before he can even mention it. The three of them are the best in the country; the world, maybe. They take the never-never-land scribblings of the theoreticians and make them tangible.

Dreams made real, these three have managed to hold and tame the ultimate genie, keep those charged particles in place. One hundred million degrees Celsius, and these three built the bottle to hold it.

Daryl walks up to them, grins hugely, takes the Dry from Tommy, and pours down a quick toast. "Gentlemen," he says, "a toast. To the bottle."

They raise their beers, clink them together. They've been meeting here on Fridays for two years now, sometimes toasting a step forward, sometimes not. The place is loud, crawls with pretty women, has expensive beer. Fantasyland.

Tommy looks around the room, says optimistically, "Lot of women here tonight, guys. Let the games begin," and takes a quick swallow of his beer followed by another handful of peanuts from the bowl on the bar.

He always says this, and the three of them always laugh knowingly, admitting what won't really happen, never has, never will. All three of them push their glasses up tight against the bridge of the nose, look around.

And Daryl sees her immediately, already looking his way, focusing in on him, smiling. Sweet Jesus.

The left knee shakes again, getting weak on him. Could this really be? He smiles back. She tilts her head, winks. She wants him to come over there.

He points at himself, looks at her questioningly. She laughs, nods yes. Tommy and Clark are starting to figure it out.

"Am I wasted on one beer, or is that incredible female over there

looking at you and smiling?" Tommy asks Daryl.

He doesn't respond, can't.

Instead, he just turns his head toward his two friends, nods, and starts walking over to her, picking his way through the crowd. She stands out, dressed in blue, a skirt with some sort of wide belt around it, a gold necklace, a gauzy blouse that he can almost see through, her breasts full and round and perfect, the nipples outlined through the bra, through the blouse. And that face. And that smile. Daryl feels a bead of sweat at his left temple, and the left knee is decidedly weak again.

He is lost; this is not his world. What's he supposed to say to her? He is absolutely unprepared for this. There are no design parameters here, no rigorous guidelines, nothing elegantly clean in its theory, waiting for Daryl to make it real.

He reaches her. Stands there for a second.

"Hello," he says. It sounds inane, but is all he can manage.

"Hi. Didn't I see you back on that awful bridge just a few minutes ago? In the rain? In that red Celica?"

"Yes." He should say more, but can't.

"That was nerve-racking, wasn't it, driving across that thing in that storm? What a terrible design that bridge is. No shoulders, no place to pull over. Just those low guardrails, and then you're in the bay. I was so glad when I reached the end."

"Do you come here a lot?" Daryl asks, and then realizes he's blown it. She had a conversation started for him, and he asks her a stupid question like that. God, he's no damn good at this.

But she smiles at him, goes with it. "No, this is my first time. My sister told me about it, said it was fun, with good people."

She has a funny way of talking. She hesitates, as if she's thinking the whole sentence through before saying it. She tilts her head a bit to the right when she pauses, the smile frozen, and then she speaks.

Daryl thinks it's charming as hell, thoughtful and sexy.

She's incredible. Daryl forgets all about Tommy and Clark, forgets about celebrating containment and ignition, forgets about everything except buying her another margarita, listening to her talk, just looking at her.

It is, he thinks a bit later, the best forty-five minutes of his life. She's down for a month visiting her sister, is thinking of moving here, is tired

of Cleveland, where's she's a nurse, works with preemies. She loves the weather, hates the traffic, misses baseball and the Indians, loves the beaches — all of that, just a normal conversation.

The music seems very loud. That's never bothered Daryl before, but it does now.

She seems bothered, too, says, "Would you like to go somewhere quieter, just talk?"

Would he? God.

He walks over to the guys, doesn't have to say a thing. Tommy says, "Go for it. See you tomorrow afternoon at the lab," and smiles. Clark raises his beer in salute.

IN THE parking lot, she leads the way, walks to her Porsche. She unlocks the passenger-side door, opens it, and leans in. She tugs hard and straightens up. There's a mannequin in her arms, the other woman Daryl saw before. It's just the upper torso of a woman, long-haired red wig, rouged cheeks, lipstick, permanently enigmatic Mona Lisa smile, a distant stare. Spooky, really, Daryl thinks.

The blonde laughs at him. "I take her with me everywhere," she says, and smiles at Daryl, "so people won't think I'm alone."

He helps her with it, holds it while she unlocks the front trunk. The thing is heavier than it looks. And warm somehow.

But he lays it in there, and she slams the lid shut, and they get into the car — she's at the wheel — and everything, Daryl thinks, is fine, just fine.

She drives, though, like a maniac. Daryl has never gone this fast on four wheels. Ever.

And she talks while she drives, even turning to look at him while she talks, rounding that sharp curve at the Eisenhower entrance onto the interstate and accelerating through it while Daryl tries to act cool, like he does this all the time, like he knows what he's doing, like he's under perfect control.

But he's not; the ride is terrifying. The whole situation is terrifying, is more than he can handle, even while she laughs and chats, seems in perfect control. Daryl takes a deep breath, looks over at her. She downshifts as they come up to a pack of cars that block all three lanes. She scoots right, accelerates, and they're through it, just like that, silky smooth like those breasts through the blouse, those nipples outlined and

hard. Daryl shifts in his seat, rearranges things. Damn.

And she's talking idly about the humid weather, about what it does to her hair.

"Your hair looks great," he manages to say.

They're going a good ninety, maybe more, down the interstate. She turns to look at him again. "Thanks. What about my lips?" And she purses them, like she's throwing him a kiss.

Daryl squirms in his seat. "They're great. Just great. Where're we going?"

"Well," she says, and shakes her head a bit so that her perfect hair, mussed as if from a romp in bed and then frozen there for him, tosses lightly in the slight breeze from the Porsche's air-conditioning. "Well, I thought we're so close to my place that we'd just go there. Maybe stop and get a bottle of champagne on the way. Sound O.K.?"

All he can do is shake his head yes, but she gets the message, and they do it, pulling off the interstate, going down a few blocks, and pulling into a liquor-store parking lot. Daryl gets shakily out, walks into the store, and buys the first promising thing he can find, a bottle of Asti Spumante.

After the store, they round another harrowing corner or two, and then they've arrived — a two-story, Greek-columned home on an inlet from the bay. There's a dock, a sailboat, another Porsche in the driveway.

Her sister must be doing all right, Daryl thinks, but doesn't say anything, ask any questions. He's still thinking he might turn into a pumpkin at any moment.

They get out, open the trunk, and get the mannequin; and then, Daryl carrying the redheaded torso, they all go in the side door with her key, and she flicks on lights as they walk down a long hall and into a bright, Mexican-tiled kitchen, pots and pans clinging to a round brace hung from the ceiling, wet bar lining one side of the room, its counter overlooking a sunken living room. Quite a place, Daryl thinks.

"Have a seat, O.K.? I'll be back in a second," she says, and walks out another door.

Numbly, not believing it's happening, he sets the mannequin down on one of the barstools that line the counter. His finger catches on it somewhere, and he feels a quick pinprick of pain.

He sucks on the offended finger as he unwinds the wire on top of the Asti's cork, reading the label while he works on the wire. He's always done that, always read everything he could get his hands on: cereal boxes as

a boy, book covers in high school, whatever, whenever. And now this: "Consorzio Dell'Asti, Italian Sparkling Wine."

So Asti Spumante comes from Italy, isn't really champagne at all, he thinks. Just looks like it.

She comes back, wearing a T-shirt. It says, "Cleveland Indians," in two lines across the chest, and has a picture of the Indian himself on it.

That's all she's wearing. Her breasts now push against the "I" and the "n" in Cleveland. The Indians start and end with them, those maddening nipples firm against the cotton. She says, "I've been in that damn dress for hours. I had to wear it to a dinner party first. I hope you don't mind me getting comfortable."

Daryl has absolutely nothing to say.

She takes the bottle from his hand, peels away the rest of the wire, pops the cork. Asti gushes out for a second, spilling over in effervescence, splashing onto the tiles before it settles down. "That's my favorite part," she says, and pours them two glasses. Daryl notices that she doesn't clean up the spill.

He wants to say something, thinks he should, but can't, for the life of him, come up with so much as a phrase. It is all very unreal, very distant, like he's reading about it in some book or short story.

She walks over to a couch, hits two switches. A TV comes on in a corner that Daryl hadn't noticed yet. Low lights come on, too. She sits, smiles at him, says, "You're an interesting guy, you know it?"

Daryl walks over to her, sits down on the couch, looks at her. Behind her, he can see the mannequin, sitting on that barstool like it's watching them.

"Daryl," she says, and it's the first time she's said "Daryl" since they traded names back at Spanky's. She's Amanda. "Daryl," she says, "there are so many guys out there who, well . . . it's like there's nobody home when you talk to them, like they're all bottle and no contents inside."

She shakes her head slowly, the hair falling across her face so she has to brush it back with her hand, tuck it behind her right ear, smile reflectively. She leans forward toward him. All he can think of for some reason is the damn Cleveland Indians. Who plays shortstop for the Indians? Who's on first? I don't know.

"You're different. You're really smart," she says, and then scoots smoothly across the couch, puts her left hand behind Daryl's head, brings

his face toward hers, and kisses him. It is a good, slow, probing kiss.

It is, in fact, the best kiss of Daryl's life. It goes on forever, and he's about to explode, to lose it right here on the couch. God, he can barely think.

She ends the kiss, sits back. "I'm sorry," she says, apologizing. "You're so sweet; you're so innocent. I just wanted to kiss you."

"It's O.K.," he manages to say. He's very hard, and it's uncomfortable, but he's afraid to move and rearrange things. She'll see how excited he is. She'll laugh at him.

This is all some sort of joke. The thought comes to him wildly. He'll wind up walking home. This is all a setup, some practical joke to embarrass him, put together by Tommy and Clark, those sons of bitches. It's all fake.

But it isn't; it's very, very real. She rises, walks over to him, holds out her hand, pulls him up from the couch, smiling at him gently all the time, and leads him away, into a bedroom, muted lights, music now, some old Mel Tormé — God, she even likes Mel Tormé, Daryl thinks. Tormé is Daryl's favorite. Daryl even bought a Was Not Was album just to have the cut on it from Mel, some song about a guy turning blue. He tries to remember the lyrics, but it's hopeless.

She undresses him, taking off his glasses first and putting them on a desk near the bed. Then she helps him loosen his tie, undo the buttons on the J.C. Penney shirt and drop it onto the floor, let the pants slide, tug off the socks, and then slowly, achingly slowly, she pulls down his blue bikini undershorts, puts her arms around his neck, pulls him to her, and kisses him again.

It's incredible; it lasts forever and then is suddenly over. Daryl is dizzy with it, is so lost he notices but doesn't care when she leaves for a minute and comes back with the mannequin, puts it on top of the chest of drawers over at the side of the room. It doesn't matter; nothing matters.

She crosses her arms in front of those wonderful breasts, grasps the bottom of the Indians T-shirt, pulls it up and over her head, and her skin is perfect and the breasts beyond his vocabulary as she drops the Indians on the floor, sits on the bed, and reaches up to take his hand and pulls him down to her.

Long minutes pass as he explores this place, his head, his hands guided by her as he kisses her breasts, her taut stomach, her arms and fingers and

calves and thighs and then, without knowing how it has happened, he is inside her, is moving with her, rising and rising and rising, it seems.

She moves beneath him in a kind of harmonic wave, and it is all those years of fantasy turned real. No, it is more than his fantasies, the pushing, contracting, her breath in quick gasps and her nails in the small of his back, and Daryl is in places he never thought he'd be; and then, as he reaches it, as he moans and gasps and ejaculates, there is an odd noise from her, a gurgle, and her hands fall from his back, and it's over, just like that.

Odd, the way it ended. But "Amanda," Daryl says after a while, "that was wonderful. You're wonderful."

There's no answer. He doesn't care. In the warmth of it all, he thinks, she doesn't need to answer.

He nearly drifts to sleep, murmurs something else to her, then realizes how thirsty he is. Some of that Asti sounds perfect. Slowly, languidly, in a James Bond, great-lover, cool-as-he-can-be style, he rolls to the other side of the bed, puts his feet down, stands with his back to her, and says, "Glass of Asti for you?"

Still no answer.

He turns to look at her, and she's lying there, silent, staring up at the ceiling, a film of sweat on those perfect breasts.

"Amanda?" He reaches over to her, waves his hand in front of her eyes, shakes her slightly. Nothing. "Amanda?"

Whoa. Daryl is confused. Drugs? Coma? He has no idea. She isn't dead; she's breathing, calmly, steadily.

"Daryl," He hears a voice. Female, husky, a faint accent. British? It sounds trained, perfect.

"Daryl," he hears again, and turns, and it's the mannequin.

"I've had to power her down for now, Daryl. But she'll be fine, just fine."

"Power down?"

"There was a problem. It's difficult to explain. We were holding a matrix on her so she'd have appeal for you, and everything seemed fine. But then she overrode the parameters as you approached ejaculation. We could lose everything if that continued — our entry path, the physical contours, everything could go. We'd be stuck here until a recovery unit could get to us, and something like that might cost me my license. At the least there would be a quite hefty fine. It would be, well, a disaster."

"What are you talking about?" Daryl asks. He's grabbed a pillow to

cover himself, holds it across his crotch. Holding a matrix on her? Entry paths? Physical contours? License?

"She's perfect, isn't she?" the mannequin asks rhetorically, with a certain pride. "And we do that in, oh, maybe seven minutes from entry. We are lucky, of course, to have such an attractive null available for modeling. It's all so much safer with a recent null. We simply time-in, take the brain-wipe and features-scan input, then time-out right before the crash. She was going to die anyway, and this avoids all sorts of ethical problems."

"Amanda!" Daryl turns back to her and stares wildly. Blank eyes, slow breathing. "What the hell?" And turns back to the mannequin.

"What's going on here?" he says, too angry to be frightened for the moment. The Russians, he wonders? Some sort of spy thing? "Who are you? What are you?"

The mannequin chuckles, tucks her red hair back behind her ear in a gesture Daryl recognizes, says, "I am a sort of travel agent, Daryl. For the very wealthy. For those who seek" — and it pauses for a moment, chooses its words carefully — "let us say, the unusual." And the mannequin smiles.

"I don't get it," Daryl says simply, and then sits; the left knee is too weak, shaking too hard, for him to stand.

"It's really quite simple, Daryl. Up ahead a bit, there are those who can afford quite special holidays, to quite exotic places. I arrange those trips. And you" — and the mannequin chuckles at the thought — "are very, very exotic."

"What are you talking about?"

"The bottle, Daryl. And virginity. You invented the first, and you have the second. Where I come from, that makes you enormously attractive to certain clients."

"Amanda is a client of yours? And how do you know I am, I was, a virgin?" Daryl finds that hard to say, adds, "And where do you come from?"

The mannequin laughs. "It's when I come from — up ahead a bit, where you're famous, Daryl. You're the man whose invention did it all for us, for better or worse.

"Tomorrow, when you go to the lab and reach ignition, the world changes. You won't recognize the place in a few years, Daryl, how rich the rich are, how poor the poor. And the fights that take place to control that bottle. It's all quite stunning, really. Millions prosper. Millions die."

"Die. Because of me? You're crazy." Daryl reaches over to the desk and

gets his glasses. He puts them on, thinking maybe this will make it all clear for him, but it doesn't help. "This is all some sort of weird dream. I've been drugged or something."

"Right," the mannequin says. "This is all make-believe, Daryl. None of it is real. I've initiated the mnemonic-fade cycle for you. It will take effect in a few minutes, and then you'll be free to go. All of this will be forgotten."

Daryl starts to ask a question about mnemonic-fade cycles, about memory, but it slips away. Instead, he says, "Amanda is a tourist?" He remembers she'd said that to him.

"Well, in a fashion, yes. Amanda is a device, a kind of recorder, that my client will jack into when we get back, Daryl. The whole experience will be there then: all the emotion, the physical sensation, the flirtation, the heat, your delightful innocence. All of it, complete."

Daryl stares at the mannequin. It's all absurd, some horrible cosmic joke. Behind him, on the bed, is Amanda, his first encounter, his first love — and she's a machine. God, he's made love to a machine.

The mannequin says, "We work together, Amanda and I. The main-frame unit does occupy quite a bit of space, unfortunately, what with the travel parameters and the personality. Sometimes I do it with a suitcase sort of thing, sometimes a backpack, or saddlebags, or a favorite dog — it all depends, of course, on the time frame. In this frame, with Amanda, with you, we use the mannequin. It's different, at least. And it's something that never seems to bother you." And the mannequin smiles, a coy upturn at the edges of the mouth, a rise at the cheekbones.

"Never bothers me? You've done this before?"

"Oh, Daryl. Of course. Twenty-seven times now? Twenty-eight? I've lost count. No matter. You're fresh and innocent and charming as hell each time."

Part of Daryl knows he should be angry, should attack the damn thing maybe, break the loop that way. But he's too confused. He wants some numbers to crunch, something definite, tangible, not all this hazy conversation. He feels a little woozy, from the Asti, he guesses. There was something he wanted to ask.

"What have you done to, to . . . ?" Damn, he can't think of her name. He turns to see her there, eyes open. Amanda, that's it. Amanda. He thinks her face looks different somehow, but he isn't sure, can't quite place just how.

"But how did you. . . ." Daryl has more questions to ask, a lot of questions, but the mannequin waves him off.

"There's a taxi waiting outside, Daryl, to take you back to Spanky's. Thank you. You've been very helpful. More than you can possibly know or appreciate, you've been very helpful."

"But. . . ."

The hand waves again. "Outside. Now. I have a lot to do here, Daryl. Please."

So Daryl starts to leave, can't think of anything else to do, really. He starts to walk out of the room, carrying his clothes. He looks back at the woman on the bed. It was great sex; he can remember that, anyway. And how beautiful she is, too. But her features are different somehow. He's not sure; he's confused. He takes a step toward her.

And she's a blank, a doll face. The eyes, those cheekbones, the lips — they're all smoothed out, smoothed over, neutral, like they were never hers at all.

He looks over at the mannequin. It smiles at him, says, "See you again soon, Daryl. But for now, the taxi is waiting." And Daryl leaves.

IV

A HALF HOUR later, Daryl is back at Spanky's, talking to the guys, inventing some story about her that includes great sex but leaves out other details, like the mannequin, or the part about his being famous, or the bit about tourism. Tell you the truth, he's not sure about all that, anyway; it all seems so unreal now, like it never happened.

Daryl is very tired. After one beer with the guys, he calls it quits, gets back into the Celica, drives home.

The drive back across the bridge isn't bad at all. No traffic, no rain; he's over it in ten minutes.

He gets back to the far side of the bridge and sees the yellow lights of a wrecker. They're just now towing that sports car away.

Daryl sees the wreck. It's a Porsche, gray, totaled, the driver's side collapsed down right into the seat. Looks nasty. All in all, he thinks, it's been a hell of a Friday night.

It's 5:00 A.M. Friday morning, and Daryl's feeling sluggish and doesn't know why. He sits first on the side of the bed, then rises and walks into the bathroom, where he splashes some water on his face and brushes his teeth. That feels better.

Today's the day. By noon, maybe sooner, they'll reach break-even with the Compact Tokamak. Then tomorrow they'll reach ignition, and from there the sky's the limit! Cheap power for everyone. Bottled sun for Everyman.

He thinks of that as he shaves and showers, feeling better now, a lot better. He's humming, thirty minutes later, as he walks out the door.

And the bottle, later that day, holds the sun long enough that, for a precious few moments, they reach break-even.

Tommy and Clark and a dozen others pat Daryl on the back, shake his hand, hug him. It's happening, right here at the lab. They've done it; they've really done it.

They arrange, the three of them, to meet later at Spanky's. Today's their lucky day. Daryl's going to be famous, Tommy says to him, laughing, that big belly rolling with the effort of all the slaps and hugs and incongruous high-fives. Famous.

And Daryl frowns at that for a second, wondering why it should bother him. And then smiles, and forgets the niggling doubt, hugs Tommy back, shakes Clark's hand one more time. He's on his way. After all the years of work, he thinks, it's about damn time.



We balance two city stories with a country story. "Country Mouse" is another story about transformation, although this transformation is a familiar type. Since his last appearance in F&SF with "Drummer's Star" in our October 1987 issue, Edward Bryant has written for dozens of short fiction anthologies, most of them horror. He has been nominated several times for the Bram Stoker Award, given by the Horror Writers of America. Pulphouse/Axolotl published his most recent novel, *Fetish*, another adventure in the life of witch Angie Black (who made her first appearance in these pages). "Country Mouse" isn't horror — not really — even if it does have werewolves and other things that go bump in the night.

Country Mouse

By Edward Bryant

THE WEREWOLVES HAD been at the chicken house again, and Jerri was mad as all get-out. Damn! The Rhode Islands had been her 4-H project, exquisitely cared for, handed from hatching, watched over constantly. Obviously not watched over enough, she thought, or they would be alive instead of being spread in tatters of bloody feathers and thin strings of chicken flesh across the interior of the foul-smelling frame coop.

She surveyed the damage. This was the last straw.

"So what happened?" said her cousin Laurel from behind her.

Jerri didn't turn. "Varmints," she said shortly.

"Cool," said Laurel. The girl gestured around the coop, black leather-

clad arms moving gracefully. "I've never seen *anything* like this in the city."

Jerri did not feel charitable. "What about the drive-by shootings and all that you told me after lights-out?"

"Isn't the same," her cousin said dismissively. "No way. This blood and guts and icky stuff's so . . . natural."

"They were my pets." Jerri picked up a severed wing from the filthy floor. "Stupid snotgobblers."

"Huh?" said her cousin.

"The wolves. They've got big mouths and bigger appetites, and just about no sense. They eat everything." She examined the wing, running her index finger along the red leading edge, then let it flutter back to the straw.

"Oh." Laurel's brow furrowed. "Chickens aren't that expensive. Can't you buy more?"

"I reckon." But I won't, she thought. I'll be long gone. I'm going to run away. That's exactly what I'm going to do. She smiled at the decision. It had been a long time coming, but now it was like a huge burden being lifted from her shoulders. No more shapechangers, vampires, or night-lurking monsters. "Listen," she said to her cousin, "have you got a room at your folks' place that I could maybe use for just a little while?"

Laurel looked at her a little peculiarly, then started to smile wider. "You serious?"

Jerri shrugged. "I'm still thinking, but I'm pretty serious."

"Cool." Laurel stooped and picked up something from the floor. The girl straightened and eyed Jerri speculatively. She absently stuck some of whatever she had claimed from the floor into her mouth and chewed slowly. "You're only twelve years old," Laurel said. "What will you do?"

Jerri shrugged. "Get a job, work in a movie theater, something like that." She smiled. "Besides, you're only twelve, too."

"Just for another two months," said Laurel. "Also, as you know, I'm living at home. I don't think my folks will let me move out until I'm at least seventeen." She eyed Jerri speculatively. "You look a little older than twelve. You could probably pass for a teenage hooker."

Jerri could feel herself start to blush. "Thanks a lot," she said. "Just the thing to make my folks die of shame."

"Isn't that what you want?" said Laurel.

Jerri fell silent. "No," she finally said seriously. "All I want to do is get away from here. C'mon, Mom's probably got lunch on the table."

As the two girls walked out of the chicken coop and into the bright sunshine, something dark brown, with wide-open jaws and spread claws, leaped off the roof at Laurel. Jerri's cousin grunted as the breath whoofed out of her and she lay stunned on the hard ground. The werewolf snapped at her throat, but the girl jerked her head aside, and the jaws closed on black leather.

Jerri grabbed a dead cottonwood branch the size of a baseball bat off the ground and whipped the werewolf up alongside the snout. The creature jerked back, whined, and stared up at Jerri reproachfully. Jerri took three steps forward and kicked the werewolf right between its rear haunches. This time the creature howled in a higher octave, leaped off Laurel, and bounded toward the treeline. It snuffled as it fled, bushy tail streaming out behind.

"You O.K.?" Jerri helped her cousin up.

Laurel disgustedly fingered the shoulder of her leather jacket. "He got slobber all over me. Stupid mutt!"

"Let's go in to lunch."

The two girls walked toward the old, sprawling, built-like-Topsy ranch house.

The rooster sat on the corral fence to the right of the sun-bleached barn and crowed his fool head off. Boy, is he going to be surprised when he goes back to the coop, Jerri thought. Poor old guy.

They passed the faded 1954 green Chevy pickup with its bed full of irrigating tools. As though for the first time, the "Land of Enchantment" license plate registered in Jerri's attention. Yeah, right, she thought.

"Jerrilyn Annabelle McCandless," said her mother as the two girls entered the kitchen, "you show your cousin to the washroom and clean up those hands yourself. Who knows what you can pick up in that henhouse."

"Sure, Mom." Jerri led the way to the washroom down the back hall. She pumped vigorously on the handle of the old pump until the water, clear as crystal and cold as the winter blue northers, spilled out the spout and into the catch basin.

Laurel shook her head. "I still think that's great. It's like you can appreciate the water more if you have to work for it, huh?"

"Fine," Jerri said. "You appreciate the water for a while."

"Cool." Laurel took hold of the handle with its streaked white paint and kept the water flowing.

Jerri lathered up her hands with the bar of Lava. The soap felt scratchy as ever on her skin. The runoff in the basin was gray.

"I think maybe I'll get in a nap this afternoon," said Laurel.

"Not much sleep?" said Jerri.

"Well, it was my first night and all. It's so quiet here. Well, except for the lady."

"Oh, at midnight?"

"Yeah," said Laurel. "I thought at first it was coyotes."

"Don't say that last e," Jerri corrected.

"O.K., coyotes. That better?"

Jerri nodded. "Sorry about *La Llorona*. She really doesn't mean to bother anyone, but she can't help all that wailing and carrying on." Jerri hesitated. "I guess it's because of losing her baby a couple centuries ago, or something."

"But you're around." Laurel took her turn with the basin. "Brrr. Too bad you don't have a hot-water tap."

"Doesn't matter," said Jerri, talking about *La Llorona*. "She's still lonely. I guess she always will be. And she can't help it when she walks around outside the windows after midnight and mourns."

"In the city, she'd either get jumped by the Crips, or maybe someone'd turn her in on a noise violation."

Jerri smiled dreamily. "What's it like," she said, "being able to go to concerts anytime you want?"

Laurel raised her eyes disgustedly. "Well, first of all, you've got to set it up with your parents." She smiled, and her black lipstick shone in the sunbeams falling through the skylight. "At least there are some really rad all-ages shows. I went to a great concert two weeks ago. A group called Pus in Boots. The lead singer kept begging us all to spit at him."

"Uh, neat," said Jerri.

"You two about ready?" Her mother's voice floated down the hallway.

"Coming, Mom." She dumped the soapy water down the drain and wiped out the basin with an old towel.

Laurel said, "I'm pretty good on loft, but not too hot at distance."

"Oh, right," said Jerri. "Pus in Boots."

"Let's eat," said her cousin. "I'm as hungry as one of those —" She thought for a moment and then giggled. "—snotgobblers."

AS THE two girls entered the kitchen, Jerri's daddy came in from outside. He'd been out trying to locate strayed cattle and was sweating. He wiped a checked bandanna across his long neck. "Man, it is one scorcher out there today." He fixed his daughter and niece with his dark eyes. "You have a good morning?"

Jerri said, "Werewolves got my chickens."

Her father came over and touched her shoulder sympathetically. "I'm sorry, honey. They gotta live, too, but it shouldn't be at the expense of those Reds."

"Got 'em all."

Her father sighed. "Maybe we can pick up some more in town next week."

"It'll be too late for the 4-H record contest."

"Well, kiddo, I guess there's next year."

No, there's not, she thought, but kept the words from even showing on her face, in her eyes. There won't be any 4-H project, 'cause I'll be gone. I'll be in the city. Where I can get away from werewolves and demons, saguaro nymphs and bobwar beasts. Away from all this. And then she tried to stop thinking those things, lest her mom and papa read her mind or her expression and know what her plans were.

"Maybe Jerri could come and stay with my family," said Laurel tentatively. She smiled at the two grown-ups.

Jerri could see her mother looking disapprovingly at her cousin's lipstick.

"What, for something like a term of school?" said Daddy.

Laurel shrugged. Maybe. She could have a lot of new experiences."

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Mom. She turned back toward the stove. Jerri knew she would not list the experiences she was afraid her daughter would have in the city. But Jerri could guess.

"Now, Mother," Daddy said. He took his place at the table. Little cries of escaping steam were curling up from around the lids of the serving dishes. "Everybody have a good appetite?"

In the hot afternoon, while Laurel slept her nap, Jerri tried to work on a

poem. She loved poetry, delighted in the feeling of creating something no one had ever said before, but today nothing seemed to work.

She had nothing to say, no inspiration, and it frustrated her.

But soon, she thought, soon I will be in the city.

After supper, Laurel said she wanted to play a video movie for Jerri, a tape she'd brought with her from the city. The expensive home-entertainment center was one of the few extravagances Daddy had imported to the ranch, but he had done so in order to allow Mom to have all the lovely, romantic, sad music she wished. The stacked components included a VCR, though the machine rarely got any use. Jerri had a T-120 blank tape upon which she taped, rotated, and then taped over family situation comedies, at least the ones that came in from the crude rooftop antenna. Reception wasn't good at all, but Jerri was thrilled whenever she could make out a face or figure from what someone was wearing.

"A videotape?" said Mom. "Oh, that's nice. What movie is it?"

"Just something I knew Jerri wouldn't have seen and I thought she might like."

"But what is it?" Mom insisted.

"*Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*," said Laurel.

Daddy and Mom exchanged looks. "I don't know about that," said Mom. "Something tells me it isn't the sort of movie I'd really want Jerrilynn to see."

"Mom!" Jerri said. "I'm twelve years old."

"That's exactly it," Mom smiled gently.

"Give it a few more years," said Daddy. "You've got a long time to watch violent, sadistic movies after you're mature enough to deal with them."

Laurel looked unhappy. "Well, what are we going to do, then?"

"Why not take a walk?" said Daddy. "It will be great out there. The heat'll be cut, and the sunset's already gorgeous."

"O.K.," said Laurel grudgingly. She looked at Jerri. "You about ready to go and show me the wonders of nature?"

Laurel took her boombox with them. Neither Daddy nor Mom was happy about that, but didn't really press the issue. Probably they didn't want to trigger another fight. Daddy glanced at some of his niece's tapes: "The Cramps," he said, "Dead Kennedys, Poison, The Mekons, Alien Sex

Fiends." He shook his head. "Keep it low so you don't scare off half the stock in the countryside."

The two girls wandered up the arroyo above the house. Jerri had to admit that as many times as she'd seen it, the sunset was truly spectacular.

"We get better colors in the city," said Laurel. "It's the chemicals in the air."

Jerri glanced at her. Laurel was serious. They got to the top of the hill and looked around at the flat rocks that sometimes were used as altar stones.

"I pigged way too much," said Laurel. "Let's just sit here for a while." She set the boombox on the stone beside her and thumbed up the volume; not much, enough so they both could hear some echo from across the arroyo.

Each girl lay on her back on an altar stone and watched as the stars began to come out. The last sun from the west faded, and the sky deepened to black. "Not too bad," said Laurel. "I remember in fourth grade when Mrs. Witherspoon gave us a section on space and told us all about the constellations. I came in the next morning and said she was mistaken or had out-of-date books, or something. I'd looked at the sky the night before and could hardly see any stars at all." She laughed. "This is really *real*."

A light flared briefly across the zenith.

Jerri said, "When I was just a kid, sometimes I'd sleep outside with Mom, and we'd count meteors."

Another bright light cut laterally across the sky from out of the southwest. It paused for a few seconds between the horns of the recently risen moon, then cut away at a sharp angle and was gone almost faster than the eye could follow.

"Aliens," said Jerri. "When I first saw the spaceships, I thought they were great. Now there're just so darned *many* of them."

The pair kept watching and continuing to tote up meteor trails.

The Metallica cassette ended, the player shut off automatically, and Laurel did not slot in a new tape.

A pair of large, satiny wings whispered in the air, and something with glowing red eyes and white-shining fangs buzzed them. Jerri flapped her jacket at the thing. "Shoo!" she said. "Get away! Go on."

With a hiss of disappointment, it went.

"What was that?" said Laurel.

"Vampire. Usually they go after the sheep. They're pests. Guess they're about everywhere in this state except for Las Cruces."

"How come not there?"

"I don't know," said Jerri. "Maybe the name."

"Silver City's probably cool, too," said Laurel.

They stayed and talked awhile longer, forgetting about totalling up the number of meteors they'd seen. After a time the dropping temperature couldn't be ignored.

"Look," said Laurel, pointing.

A winged dinosaur looped back and forth across the moon, scaly hide picking up highlights from the lunar light. The reptile suddenly dove, disappearing when it descended lower than the distant hills. Both girls heard a distant squeal.

"Rabbit, probably," said Jerri. "Those things really kept 'em down. My dad's tough on rabbits, too. He's been trying to get those critters up there declared protected."

Laurel cradled her boombox in her arms, and the two of them started the trek back down to the ranch house. Jerri didn't even bother pointing out the fairy lights from the lower pasture off to their right. Nor the dusky crimson glow of the demons who stalked and sometimes preyed upon the less wise of the fairies.

"So what do you think?" said Laurel. "You want to stay up late in bed, play music, and talk again?"

"Sure," said Jerri. "I'd like that."

Laurel sighed. "But when we finally do get talked out and go to sleep, I hope that *La Llorona* keeps it down to a dull roar."

Jerri led her cousin past the old graveyard behind the house. The parched earth crackled and snapped, the sound of the dead trying to claw their way to the surface.

"I'm getting a little sleepy," said Laurel.

It was quiet inside the house, with light spilling out in the living room from the dying flames in the fireplace. The fire elemental blinked at them as the two girls walked through the room and toward the back hall. It took a few minutes to get ready for bed.

This is fun, Jerri thought, as she washed her face and started to brush her hair. It's really nice to have some company.

Laurel and she had to share the big old bed that Jerri's grandmother had owned. But there was lots of room.

Jerri's parents apparently had gone to bed. The girls sat cross-legged on the goose-down comforter and giggled as Laurel slowly increased the volume on the boombox. "Just a little at a time," she said. "They'll hardly notice."

Wrong. Jerri heard parental sounds approaching through the hall.

"Cut out that damned racket!"

The door shook under repeated blows, then shuddered off its hinges. The wood slab slammed down on the floor, kicking up dust. Laurel stared, shocked.

Daddy Yig, avatar of the snake god, slithered into the bedroom. His snout was red and already swollen from knocking down the door. He shot the girls a venomous look. "Noisssse."

"Yes, Pa," Jerri said.

He glided over to Laurel's boombox and, slightly more gently than he'd hit the door, tapped the off button with the tip of his snout. He winced. "Sssorry, girlssss." The Cramps stuttered and stopped. Without another word, he turned and departed the room.

Jerri and Laurel exchanged looks. "That tape better be O.K." Laurel muttered.

"Bedtime, girls." Quiet, wraithlike, Jerri's mother came into the room and put them to bed. "Do you want a light left on?" she said, lightly stepping over the splintered door. "I can shut off the one in the hall."

"That'll be fine, Mom," said Jerri.

Her mother snapped the light switch outside, and darkness enveloped the room. Jerri stared toward the window, straining to see the stars. A door banged shut.

The wailing started outside the house. *La Llorona*, the weeping woman, drifted across the dusty yard.

"Jeez," said Laurel disgustedly. "Parents."

"I really do have to get out of here," said Jerri. And then, suddenly, strangely, she wondered if she'd ever, someday, want to return. But more than that, the thought struck like desert lightning: when I go, will *La Llorona* wait for me?

"I don't blame you," said Laurel. "You're a hundred miles from the nearest mall."

Jerri only half-heard. She suddenly saw herself years and years in the future. Old. Whom, she wondered, will *I* wail for?

Her cousin turned to the wall and grumbled something that sounded like, "Growing up sucks."

"Yes," Jerri said softly, "don't I know it."

THE DAY HIS MOTHER PREDICTED
YEARS AGO FINALLY ARRIVES.



"Hi! We've come home to roost!"



FILMS

K A T H I . M A I O

THE WHINE OF A 50 FT. WOMAN

SCIENCE FICTION films should always be "ahead of their time." But, it pains me to say, this is not always the case. While speculative movies have consistently pushed out the envelope of FX and the other technologies of movie making. They haven't always furthered social progress. ("Why should they?" you might ask. But if you *do*, please read no further.)

Like many people, I enjoy science fiction film not (just) for its glimpses at fantastical aliens and mutant monsters, but for its insights into the heart of man. But what about women? Aye, there's the rub. If I look back upon the portrayal of women in film — and it is my wont to do just that — I can't recall that the fantasy and S.F. movies I grew up watching were better than any others at showing women as complete, complex human beings.

The same set of (limited, mutual-

ly exclusive, thoroughly insulting) images of women that dominated old films of the here-and-now also existed in science fiction and fantasy films. Call the role dichotomy what you will — Mother/Whore, Bimbo/Bitch, Victim/Villainess — it's all the same, and none too pleasant.

When I reminisce about the old black and white movies I used to tune into on Saturday morning television, two pictures pop into my mind of fantasy females. The first is of a woman screaming her head off, backing away from some alien or flailing helplessly in some monster's clutches. The only hope for Fay Wray and all the other Sisters of Shriek was if an armored division or some Dudley Dornight in a silver lame jumpsuit came to the rescue.

My other visual memory — one I liked a lot better, at least in reel one — is of the Amazons with Attitude. Sometimes they were from

a lost continent or uncharted island. Other times they dwelled on some unexplored planet. Most of the time they had never met a man before, but their first impression of the film's hero(es) was far from positive. In fact, it was usually enough to convince them that the only good earth-boy was a dead earth-boy.

Much as I enjoyed those movies, they broke my heart every time. The alien queen was invariably killed in the last reel. That, or (in a few cases) she agreed to give up her power to the guy in the silver lame jumpsuit. Climactic downfalls included the old abdication through osculation scenario: one kiss and she was his sex-slave. If the kiss didn't prove fatal to either party, the hero then had to decide whether to love 'em and leave 'em or do the honorable thing and take his intergalactic conquest back to "civilization."

'50s fantasies being what they were, a happy ending for a dethroned space empress would have consisted, I've always surmised, with her doing hard-time in some earthly suburban tract home. It would have been a hard, transformation, to go from ruler of the planet to lady of the house. And, even as a child, I considered that a cruel choice for a beautiful queen: death or dishpan hands.

Perhaps my memories of all those movies are faulty and unfair, colored too heavily by an adult life as a feminist child of the '60s. I was going to test the point, but I couldn't find any of the space siren movies at my local video store. I did, however, find another schlock classic of my youth, *The Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958).

Watching her again, I couldn't believe what a pitiful, utterly tame creature the title character was! If you don't remember Nancy Archer (Allison Hayes) that way, it's probably because you recall the same old poster I do. One that depicted a woman significantly larger than the stated height. 200 feet tall at a minimum, the ferocious bathing beauty stooped to snatch cars up from an elevated freeway. But that poster painting was just another false come-on for an old exploitation flick. And the art of the come-on hasn't become any more honest in the intervening years.

The 1985 video box sports the same poster art. While the copy on the back claims that Nancy is [d]riven by her murderous rage ... to take matters into her own giant hands and satisfy her gargantuan craving for revenge." Sounds like a fun movie. Too bad it wasn't the one in the box.

Nancy is needy, not wrathful. All she wants is to be loved and

taken seriously — just like King Kong and the rest of us. But you can't always get what you want, and poor Nan is constantly be-littled by the men in her life. Her bar-hound husband, Harry (William Hudson), openly cheats on her. And the sheriff and his men think she's a loon even before she tells them about her desert meeting with a giant Mr. Clean who travels around in a silver bowling ball.

Okay, so it sounds crazy. The audience knows that she's telling the truth. In her desperate attempt to prove her sanity to her contemptuous hubby and the local law, Nancy ends up having a close encounter of the third — and infectious — kind. Afterwards, she goes to bed distraught and awakens the next morning gigantic. (Well, at first it's just her *hand* that wakes up. And it looks just like an inflatable from the Macy's day parade. But this is, after all, a vintage low-budget movie.)

Harry forsakes her, leaving her to the devices of paternalistic doctors, who drug Nancy and tie her down, like a Lilliputian prisoner in her own home. But after moaning awhile for her absent mate, Nancy literally breaks out of the house. When she hits the road, Nancy is wearing a fetching giantess two-piece — similar to the buckskin bikinis worn by those women from

the lost continent — that she must have sewn in her sleep.

As put-upon as this poor woman is, Nancy Archer does *not*, at this point, go on a stomp-spree. (Although the sleazy little Sodom she calls home certainly deserves it.) No, all she wants is to be reconciled with her faithless hubby. She plaintively cries out his name all the way to the honky-tonk where Harry is partying with his popsie. Big as she is, the only way Nancy can get Harry is to send that inflatable hand in after him. This causes significant damage to property and popsies, but once she has Harry again, she's more than willing to leave town.

But the sheriff won't allow her to escape. He cruelly shoots her with a riot gun, and the blast throws her into a power transformer. Electrocutted, aglow in the darkness, she falls dead to earth with the hapless Harry still clutched in her hand. In the end, the movie seems less a science fiction ("horror") film than a wretched little domestic drama with a tragic ending.

I wish Nancy *had* been an enraged "monster" with murderous mayhem in her heart. That would have made her a truly memorable female movie hero. You could look back on a character like that and say that she refused to be diminished a moment longer by marriage or male authority. (Well, you might

not say it, but I probably would.) Film historians might have labelled such a film a "feminist revenge fantasy." But I defy anyone to call *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* a feminist revenge fantasy.

The reality of this old "cult classic" is that the title character grows in size, but she never really grows in stature. Nancy Archer begins the film as an insecure, overly-dependent wife desperate at the thought of being abandoned. And that's how the poor fool ends up. She may be big and beautiful, but she's just another whining wretch who takes a fall for the love of her no-good man.

There's an allegory there, no doubt, but it has little to do with women's power or rage. And that's my problem with the majority of science fiction films. I don't think they've helped us to see women as people who deserve and demand respect. And they could have. That's something science fiction and fantasy films could have done much better than contemporary story telling confined by women's existing roles.

There have been rare flashes of future women of power, but I don't think any fully stirred the imagination of the American viewing public until *Alien*. And that, my friends, didn't appear until 1979, long after the impact of the second wave of the

women's movement was felt everywhere — even, reluctantly, in Hollywood. (So much for science fiction films being visionary.)

Don't think that I am dismissing the importance of the valiant, androgynous Ripley, as played by the gifted Sigourney Weaver. Believe me, I am not. (More on that, perhaps, when *Alien 3* hits the screen.) I only ask: "Where are the women who will take us even further? The success of *Alien* and its almost equally impressive sequel, *Aliens* (1986), should have insured us of countless strong and intelligent women heroes. Women who are nobody's fools and no man's slaves. Legendary women that little girls might want to become. If they're out there, I must have missed them.

In the summer of 1991, much was made of the pumped-up Linda Hamilton reprising her role as Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. She is, indeed, as fierce and relentless a screen hero as you could ever hope to see. Her skill and bravery are all the more impressive for being human — and female. Ah-nald may be brawnier, and the steely Robert Patrick might get to do the spiffiest quick-change special effects, but Linda is tougher, and makes an even more incredible transformation.

From *T1* to *T2*, she changes

herself (via the writing and direction of James Cameron) from a sweet young thing who wears white knee socks and waits tables to a weathered commando who wears muscle tees and cocks and fires a shotgun with one hand.

Cameron and Hamilton had me believing that change. And I respected the fact that they fully realized, and bravely depicted, the almost psychotic obsession required to make such a metamorphosis.

And yet . . . And yet, what gives a woman permission to get that kind of spit-nails mean? Why, protecting her boy-child from danger! And since her son, John (Edward Furlong), is destined to be the savior of mankind, Sarah Connor is the mother of all of us. Talk about Super-Moms, Sarah is the *ultimate*. A madwoman madonna. The holy vessel with firepower.

Can it be that Cameron sees the

old lioness-and-her-cubs gambit as woman's only rationale for rage? (Remember, it was Cameron who made Ripley take on a maternal mission in *Aliens*. In *Alien*, Ridley Scott and Dan O'Bannon allowed her to fulfill a destiny that had nothing to do with biology.)

I see nothing wrong in portraying women as gallant mothers. (Hey! I love Greer Garson as Mrs. Miniver.) As long as that's not *all* we're allowed to be. As the movie about miserable Nancy Archer illustrated so many years ago, making a woman larger than life doesn't guarantee that she'll command the screen, or even take control of her own fate. It's good to see women like Ripley and Sarah Connor, who can do both. But firepower shouldn't be the only (or even the best way) for a woman to show her strength. And motherhood shouldn't be her only motivation for empowerment.



Nancy Farmer lived in Zimbabwe for 17 years before returning to the United States in 1988. She currently works at a DNA lab at Stanford. Her short fiction won the Writers of the Future Gold Award in 1987, and her first novel will appear sometime next year. About this story, Nancy writes, "Origami Mountain" is about two ordinary policemen on a routine assignment who find themselves in a Japanese maze with a few more corners than there ought to be. It's about a form of gardening you won't find described in any book. It's about racism, too, but not the kind you expect."

Origami Mountain

By Nancy Farmer

WHEN JIRO Tanaka did not come home from work, his wife, Miya, assumed he was at a nightclub. Even when he did not arrive by midnight, she sighed and went around their mansion in Pacific Heights. She checked the windows, the burglar alarm, and the children's bedrooms. Then she lay in bed and listened for the sound of his feet on the floor.

The Tanaka house had been built with wooden floors that squeaked when anything larger than a mouse ran over them. They were called *nightingale floors*, a feature of old Japanese castles, where it was a matter of life and death to know when someone was creeping up on you. Dr. Tanaka had imported an architect from Japan to build them.

Miya wondered which nightclub he was in. He would be surrounded by his favorite employees. They would laugh at all his jokes and get drunk

before he did. At the end of the night, Jiro would be left alone with his helpless and stupefied workers. The more disgusting they were, the more powerful he would feel, which was how it should be: he was the boss.

Or perhaps he was at an obscene movie. He liked pornography, especially the kind where the women were tied up and tortured. It wasn't enjoyable for him to bring home a video because Miya didn't react. She sat, stony-faced, showing neither pleasure nor distress. It was better to take a fresh-faced employee who would trip over his shoelaces if a woman smiled at him. Like Jimmy.

Miya felt sorry for Jimmy. He was as close to a farm boy as you could find in someone with a Ph.D. in physics. Jimmy came from Okinawa, a mark against him because Jiro was prejudiced against people from Okinawa. They had big heads, he said, big hands and curly hair. They were like oxen. Jimmy had a wide, innocent face and freckles, as well as a friendly, open attitude. Jiro did not trust spontaneously friendly people.

He would have taken Jimmy to an obscene movie, and perhaps others to watch the fun. Miya felt sorry for him, but there was nothing she could do about it. She couldn't even protect herself.

When Jiro had not appeared by breakfast, another possibility occurred to her: he had a mistress. This did not upset her. She hoped he had, because he would spend all his time with her. No doubt he'd gone straight from his assignation to the office. Miya woke the children up, bathed and fed them. They spent a pleasant day in Origami Park, and when they got home, Jiro wasn't there.

With one thing and another, a week passed before Miya thought to report it to the police.

"A whole week!" yelled Homer, slamming down the receiver. "The head of one of the biggest companies in San Francisco goes missing a week before anyone reports it."

His partner, Stewart, opened a new file on the Mac and entered Jiro Tanaka's name. "Anybody miss him at work?"

"Yeah, they knew he was gone," said Homer. "The work went on without him. Japanese factories are like that. Someone drops dead, and the next person in line takes his place."

"What do they make?" Stewart spun the cylinder in his revolver, a habit that intrigued Homer. He thought of it as the policeman's prayer wheel.

"What don't they make?" he said. "Every kind of chemical, but they're

best known for Yum Powder."

Stewart whistled. "Didn't they get the pants sued off them for that?"

"Still in court. And likely to stay there for the next hundred years. Can't prove a thing."

"Except that one hundred thousand babies dropped about twenty I.Q. points eating it," said Stewart.

"Babies Cry for Yum Powder," said Homer. "How can you prove a twenty-point I.Q. drop? Anyhow, our problem is to find this benefactor of mankind and return him to his grieving employees."

"Haven't we got more important things to do?"

"Would you rather be breaking into a crack house in Oakland?"

"No," admitted Stewart.

"Besides, the chief says to give this case our best. Tanaka donated about a million to certain city officials."

"Ah," said Stewart.

They made a strange-looking pair. Stewart was a barrel-chested white man of about two hundred pounds. In a swim suit, he looked as though he were wearing a fur coat, but even in uniform the hair crept down the back of his hands and up his neck. He had short, bandy legs, but he could move like an express train when he had to.

Homer, on the other hand, was just over the minimum height and weight limit for a police officer. He looked like a black business executive. His shoes were always polished, and the cuticles trimmed from his nails. But if you asked a crook which policeman he would rather be left alone with, he always chose the bigger man.

They stood outside the hulking mansion in Pacific Heights. "Look at the security," said Stewart. Cameras scanned them from a high wall; floodlights pointed in at the garden. He rang the bell.

"Please show I.D.," said a voice from behind the gate. The officers held their wallets up to the camera. The bolts drew back, and a gardener peered at them. "Down!" he shouted. For an instant the policemen thought he meant them, but snarls erupted as the man dragged a pair of pit bulls from the path and clicked chains on their collars. Stewart's hand strayed to his can of Mace. Homer looked bland, as he always did when most dangerous.

"Very sorry," the gardener apologized. "I should have locked them up before you arrived."

They followed him to the house, where a small, middle-aged woman

waited. "Mrs. Tanaka?" said Homer.

"Thank you for coming," she said. She took them on a tour of the house as she talked about her husband. Homer and Stewart followed in the hope of uncovering a lead.

"These floors need an oil job," remarked Stewart as squeaks rippled through the wood.

Mrs. Tanaka giggled, and explained about nightingale floors.

"Did your husband have a lot of enemies?" said Homer. Mrs. Tanaka giggled again, a sound, he thought, that could get irritating. She didn't answer the question, however. They came to the master bedroom, and Homer halted abruptly at the door. Stewart swallowed hard. There, on a shelf, was a row of the most grotesque Black Sambo dolls Homer had ever seen. There were at least ten, with goggle eyes and fat, rubbery lips.

Mrs. Tanaka noticed Homer's stare. "Aren't they cute?" she said. "Jiro buys them in Japan. One of them even talks. Would you like to hear it?"

"No," said Homer in a strangled voice. They went on, with the woman chattering about Jiro's habits, but in fact saying nothing about where he might be. They came to a recreation room, and she clapped her hands at two children, a boy and a girl, who were jumping on an expensive sofa in front of a TV.

They thrust power gloves at the screen and shrieked with excitement. "Please get down," Mrs. Tanaka said. The children slid to the floor and sat there, quivering like a pair of cats in a room full of mice.

"Can we go to Origami Park?" said the boy. "We're bored."

"After the officers have gone," said Mrs. Tanaka.

"Are you cops?" said the boy. Homer nodded. "Oh boy, have you killed anyone? Let me see the guns."

"We're Peace Officers," explained Stewart. "We don't kill people. You may not see the guns."

"They're phonies," the boy told his sister, and they went back to Nintendo.

The policemen found out nothing from Mrs. Tanaka or the gardener. Stewart drove to the factory. "Nice dolls," he said, while having a *mano-a-mano* with a cable car on one of San Francisco's steepest streets.

"Remind me to show you my collection of honkie dolls. Don't play chicken with cable cars. They always win." Homer slid down in the seat so he would not have to see the inflamed face of the cable car driver as they

shot past. "I don't think Jiro Tanaka ran away. He has everything he could want right here."

"Maybe it was the lawsuit over Yum Powder," grunted Stewart, bumping across the trolley tracks on Market Street. "What exactly did it do?"

"Made everything taste *wonderful*. It was a super brain stimulant."

"Like monosodium glutamate?"

"Much better. The food didn't even have to be good to begin with. Manufacturers could use it on dog shit, and probably did."

"How did it get past the Food and Drug people?" Stewart rolled into the wasted streets of the Mission District. Suddenly it was as though they weren't in the same town. They found themselves in a sinkhole so depressing, you'd have to kick in a window to keep from thinking about suicide.

"It passed the tests," said Homer. "This is one armpit of a neighborhood." He rolled up his window. "The additive was too expensive to produce, though, so Tanaka used a genetically altered bacterium to make huge quantities of it. There was a contaminant. Jesus, is that the factory?"

They came around a corner to a dead-end street. Ahead was the Jigoku Chemical Works. Gray and windowless, it sat like a giant turd on a concrete serving dish.

"Holy Moly, I thought Japanese were fanatics about beauty," said Stewart.

"Doesn't look like it," said Homer. The men were silent as they drove to the iron doors. More cameras, more clanking of chains. The air smelled — Homer wasn't sure *what* it smelled like, but it made the skin on his neck creep. The gate went up, and they drove in. The bottom level was a parking lot. A guard led them to an elevator. At each floor the elevator paused, and they looked out on industrial scenes that came out of Dante.

Huge pipes snaked around boilers; vats bubbled, steam hissed, and the noise was constant, shrill, and deafening. And behind it all was the strange smell, like hot, raw meat, or maybe the mouth of a predatory beast.

"You like working here?" Homer asked the guard.

"Of course! Jigoku is the greatest company in the world. Biggest per capita production, lowest overhead. We Jigoku employees take pride in bringing better living to people everywhere."

"Just thought I'd ask," said Homer. He thought he was going to vomit if he didn't get fresh air soon, but fortunately, the top floor was offices, and the

smell was weaker. They were ushered into a small room.

"Air's better," sighed Homer. "How do they get a flower to survive here?" He nodded at a flower arrangement on a low table.

"Fake," said Stewart, feeling the petals.

"By the time the day's over, I'm not gonna have any illusions left. Do you think they have plastic-flower-arranging classes?"

"And tea-bag ceremonies," said Stewart.

Their hysterical laughter was interrupted by a young man in a lab coat. "So happy you like our factory," he said. Homer did a double take. Yes, the man had freckles.

"Jimmy Tsuga," he said, extending a hand. Homer had the impression that, not long ago, Jimmy Tsuga had been up to his ankles in cow shit. All he needed to complete the hayseed image was a sprig of buckwheat between his front teeth.

"Have you found anything out about our director?" said Jimmy.

"We're making inquiries," Homer said. "Can you tell me why no one reported his absence for a week?"

"We thought he was taking a vacation."

"Does the director always take vacations without telling anyone?"

Jimmy ducked his head and giggled, exactly like Mrs. Tanaka. Homer was fascinated. "There's a film festival in town," the scientist managed to say.

"Film festival?" said Stewart, genuinely puzzled.

Jimmy's embarrassment deepened. "Erotic film festival." The two policeman stared at him, but he didn't elaborate.

"This goes on all day?" said Homer gently.

"All night. During the day" — Jimmy paused to gather his inner resources — "he rests up."

"Where does he rest up?"

"Various places," said Jimmy vaguely.

"Dr. Tsuga," said Homer in a calm voice that made Stewart, who knew him, tense up. "A very important man is missing. He is a multimillionaire. He has great political influence. He is the kingpin of a worldwide chemical industry, but nobody seems to miss him for an entire week. Nobody has any idea of his habits or where he might be. You know what this smells like to me, Dr. Tsuga? It smells like murder, and one of the first things an investigator looks for is who benefits from it. Who gets to

inherit the directorship of Jigoku Chemical Works if Jiro Tanaka is dead?"

"Me," said Jimmy.

"I thought so. Now, for all I know, Jiro Tanaka has been cooked up in one of those boilers we passed on the way up here. The smell is bad enough, but before we get into the ins and outs of dismantling this place to look for bone fragments, do you have any idea where Dr. Tanaka might be resting up from his midnight beaver shows?"

The effect of this statement was extraordinary. Jimmy turned so pale, the freckles stood out like inkblots. He opened his mouth, but no sound came out. For a moment, Homer thought he was going to confess, but such things happened only to Perry Mason. After a few moments, Jimmy said, "Origami Park."

"That's the second time I've heard that mentioned today. Is it reasonable for a man to spend a whole week in a park? Or is it something like Disneyland?"

"You could spend a lifetime in Origami," said Jimmy. "But it's not a theme park. It's —" He struggled to find the words. "You see, most of our employees come from Japan. We have an arrangement with other companies to rotate their workers here. It gives them a chance to learn English and to see another country."

"It also means you don't have to pay them much," said Homer.

"That's true," admitted Jimmy. "The point I'm making is, quite often they're disappointed. Housing is difficult, customs are strange, and the workplace is not . . . attractive."

"You could say that," said Stewart.

"We Japanese need beauty," went on Jimmy in a rush, as though he were afraid he would lose his nerve if he paused. "Everywhere, even in the poorest house, there's a scroll or a flower, something a person can look at to feel uplifted. But here" — he swept out his arm to include the whole factory — "it's like Hell. Noise, ugliness, stench. It drives people crazy. They commit suicide. You have no idea how many people we lost when this place first opened. The factories in Japan complained, and I argued with Dr. Tanaka to please, please put in a garden and control the noise, but he said this was the most efficient factory in the world. We weren't allowed to change a single bolt or put up a picture —" He stopped, breathing heavily. Homer and Stewart didn't say a word. They knew they would get better results by waiting.

"Finally," said Jimmy after he had calmed down, "the companies in Japan refused to send more workers, so he built Origami Park."

"Which is beautiful," said Homer softly.

"Yes! It's like a piece of Japan. No matter what terrible things happen, you can go there and be healed."

"You're homesick, aren't you?" said Homer.

Jimmy said nothing, but stared at the plastic flower arrangement. Suddenly he ripped it out and threw it on the floor. "I'll give you a pass to Origami Park. You can't get in otherwise."

He led them down the stairs rather than using the elevator, so they could get a better look at the factory. "What is that smell?" said Stewart.

"Yum Powder."

"Yum Powder?"

"Dr. Tanaka thought we should keep making it."

"But it's banned."

"Not in Africa. Anyhow, we aren't making it anymore. I'm having the vats cleaned, which is why there's still a slight smell. You should have been here last week." He waved them out. Homer and Stewart paused to let a van ease onto the concrete wasteland surrounding Jigoku Chemical Works.

"Go ahead," said Homer.

"Wait." Stewart pointed at a group of men working on the far side of the wasteland. The sound of jackhammers floated back to them. "They're taking up the concrete."

"That was a nursery truck that just went up there," said Homer.

They watched as small trees were unloaded. The workers stopped drilling and went over to admire them. "They seem pretty sure Dr. Tanaka isn't coming back," said Stewart at last.

"Yes," said Homer. They drove on in silence while Homer rustled a newspaper until he found what he was looking for. "*Kingdom of Snuff Film Festival*," he read. "*Midnight shows. Just like the real thing: See beautiful, bosomy women beg for their lives. Scenes of medieval torture. Screams of agony. No mercy shown. Just like the real thing. Jesus, is this legal?*"

"You're the cop," said Stewart.

"What kind of rock did this Tanaka crawl out from?"

"You're still mad about the Sambo dolls."

"Shit, no. We're talking major evil here: a factory so terrible, people kill

themselves rather than work in it; baby poison shipped to Third World countries. No wonder someone offered him."

"We don't know that," said Stewart.

"Well, I can tell you, if he isn't dead, *I'm gonna off him.*"

"Way to go, Peace Officer," said Stewart. They crossed the Bay Bridge and worked their way through the Berkeley Hills. On the other side lay a park. You needed a pass to enter it. It was so secret, Homer bet not even the neighbors knew it was there. It certainly wasn't on the map. They drove up one of those long, golden California hills and parked in front of a high wall.

"Pretty well hidden," said Stewart. "How big would you say this place is?"

"Five acres? Ten? I don't know. I'm not a farm boy." Homer went to the gate, but it opened before he could ring the bell.

"Dr. Tsuga told me to expect you," said an old man in a gray kimono. He looked about eighty years old, but he moved with surprising briskness. The policemen followed him in. And then stopped.

And stared.

They looked for a long time, unable to speak. The scene that stretched out before them seemed to go on forever. There were hills and lakes, pines and maples, among which small houses were hidden. They were made of ribs of dark wood and paper panels: Japanese houses. The trees were Japanese, and so were the rocks. Probably the smell was, too. Homer couldn't identify it, but it was nice. The ground below was covered with a rolling mat of thick and springy green.

"Moss," said the old man. "We have four hundred varieties of moss in here, imported from Kyoto. Some people come just to look at that."

They followed him in a dream. Each corner revealed more corners; each path branched off to others. Bridges crossed noisy streams; strange birds called from the trees, threading their cries among the hollow rattle of bamboo wind chimes. And there was a wind, although the air outside had been perfectly still.

But the thing that drew their eyes, and as quickly dropped them by the sheer size and impossibility of it, was the mountain.

It rose in a graceful arc high above the groves of maple and pine. The lower slopes were dark basalt, but the top — Homer had to rub his eyes — was snow-tipped. There was only one kind of mountain that had such

perfect, classical lines: a volcano.

"Origami Mountain," said the old gardener in a quiet voice.

"How —," began Homer, but he couldn't go on. There was no logical explanation. How could a five-acre park have a whole *mountain* in it, as well as forests, lakes, and houses?

"Gardening is a very old art in Japan," said the old man in answer to his unspoken question. "We are a small island and have many people, yet everyone wants to experience nature. It was absolutely necessary to develop Origami gardening."

He led them to an inn, where a pretty young girl ducked her head and brought them tea and cakes. "Originally, Westerners thought origami applied to paper folding. You take a large sheet of paper —" He signaled to the girl, and she brought him some. "You fold it here, here, and *here*, and suddenly you have a crane." He held it up. "Or a basket or a flower. But all the while, it is really a large piece of paper. Origami gardening goes the other way. A very small piece of land is *unfolded* until it contains all the natural beauty in the world. There aren't many men who know how to do this. We were lucky to get Mr. Fukuda."

Homer found his voice at last. "Mr. Fukuda did this?"

"Yes." The old man bit into what looked like a lump of Play-Doh. "You sip the tea, which is bitter, and taste the sweetened rice cake," he explained. "It's supposed to show you the inherent bitterness and sweetness of life."

"Where is Mr. Fukuda?" said Homer, refusing to get sidetracked.

"He's working on another park."

Homer sighed. "Have you seen Dr. Tanaka in the past week?"

"Of course."

The two policemen straightened up. Here at last was something to work on. They waited. "Would you care to tell us about it?" said Stewart.

"He came a week ago," said the gardener. "About dusk, which is when most people visit. He walked up there." He pointed at the serene, snow-tipped mountain.

"Was anyone with him?"

"Many people. Origami Mountain is very popular. Dr. Tanaka was with his factory workers. They started about dusk and came back after the moon rose. It's very nice to watch the moon rise from up there, and we provide paper lanterns at the top so visitors can find their way down."

"When they returned," said Homer patiently, "was Dr. Tanaka with them?"

"No," said the gardener.

"Well, what happened to him?" Homer was having difficulty keeping his voice down.

"Stayed up there, I imagine." The old man sipped his tea tranquilly, as though he hadn't dropped a bombshell on the two policemen.

"I think we have to look. Thank you for the tea," said Homer.

"Don't mention it," said the old gardener.

They followed the trail, curving around, but slowly working their way up. "It's five miles up this fucking mountain," puffed Stewart. "How the hell did they fit it in here?"

"Don't ask me. I can't even figure out my mileage," said Homer, equally tired. But he was fueled with a kind of anger. Damn these Japanese with their boxes within boxes. He felt as though they were playing with him, deliberately leaving clues for their own ends. Well, he would follow them out. He'd get to the center of their goddamn maze and find out what their game was.

They came around a boulder and almost fell into the crater. "Jesus H. Christ," said Stewart, swaying and hanging on to the boulder. They looked down into a pit of bubbling lava. Heat painted their faces with sweat. The reek of sulfur made them gasp.

"He came up with his faithful employees, but he didn't come down," said Homer.

"God," said Stewart, turning away from the searing heat.

They went down in silence. By the time they were at the bottom, it was dusk. People had come into the garden, many people: the workers of Jigoku Chemical Works. Families walked in quiet groups. Father, mother, and dull-eyed children. They weren't at all like the children of Jiro Tanaka.

"He gave Yum Powder to his employees," said Jimmy Tsuga, making the policemen jump. He was seated on a rock by the entrance. "They were his guinea pigs."

The old gardener sat next to him, a lump in the dusk not unlike one of the craggy rocks. "You should have stayed up there," he said. "Moonrise is late, but starlight is also very nice."

"Where is Mr. Fukuda?" said Homer.

"Making another park. We got a bargain this time, a whole square mile."

Homer paused cautiously. "Where?"

"Near Detroit. The land was going cheap."

The policemen looked at the two Japanese, sitting peacefully in the shadows. Behind him a breeze stirred, laden with the scent of unknown flowers and a hint of ice. "You could fit a whole country in that," he said at last.

"You could," said Jimmy Tsuga, and, smiling, he opened the gate and showed the officers out.

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We end this issue with a novella by the multi-talented Ray Aldridge. Ray's first novel, The Pharaoh Contract, appeared from Bantam last year. The second novel, The Emperor of Everything, will follow shortly. Ray's novels, and most of his short fiction, take place in the same universe. One that includes Dilvermoon — the setting for this quirky story about love and the future.

THE LOVE FARMER

By Ray Aldridge

ONE DAY, ARRIANGEL was a free citizen of Dilvermoon — wealthy, beautiful,

and quite happy.

Then she woke in a strange, narrow bed and looked up to see a bland-faced stranger bending over her.

"Ah. You're with us," said the stranger, in a whispery voice. He smiled with his mouth, but not with his eyes.

She tried to sit up; he pressed her back and slapped a narcosack against her neck. Her muscles melted into uselessness.

The stranger spoke again. "It's my duty to inform you that you are now the property of Specialties, Inc., a subsidiary of SeedCorp/Dilvermoon."

When next she woke, she was alone.

A day passed, then another. Her cell was comfortable enough, though

not luxurious. There was a formfit bed, a holotank, a hygiene stall, and several paintings on the walls. These small canvases depicted pastoral scenes, painted in a smooth, impersonal technique. Smiling young men and women tended gardens full of flowers and fruit-laden trees. All were wholesomely attractive, and this was even more apparent because all were naked. When she looked closer, she saw that they all wore thin explosive slave collars, disguised as fashionable silver chokers. She shuddered and turned away.

The room was wedge-shaped and from all three walls projected the glassy snouts of holocam imagers. This, she thought, was the least palatable aspect of her captivity — even now, strangers watched her and judged. She wondered that she had so quickly grown used to the unseen eyes. She had even grown used to the idea that the watchers were with her when she visited the stall.

She tried to adopt a philosophical attitude. It could, after all, be very much worse. Arbrand might have sold her to a chop shop, or to one of the exty traders that infested the human sectors of Dilvermoon. She thought back over the events of the past few days, trying to see what had made Arbrand do what he had done.

Arbrand . . . it was difficult to believe he had enslaved her simply because she was no longer romantically intrigued by him. He had seemed so well-mannered, not at all the sort of person who would perform so dire an act. And she had broken off such relationships before. Many times.

She shook her head. Arbrand was certainly mad; no other explanation was possible.

She remembered his white face, his bleak eyes, the odd choking sound he made when she told him that she could no longer see him. She thought she had explained her decision with a generous degree of courtesy and tact. Certainly she had tried to be civilized. But in the next instant, he had seized her hand. She thought he was only going to attempt some desperate gallantry, so she hadn't tried to pull away until it was too late. He had pressed a sinjector against her wrist, and that tiny cold pain was the last thing she had felt, until she had awakened in the slave pen.

Arriangel went now to the mirrors that opened like silver wings in one corner, and looked critically at her reflection. She touched the corner of her jaw, brushing back the thick, honey-gold hair. She rubbed at the empty spot where her Citizenship tattoo had once been. She wondered how

Arbrand had managed to remove the tattoo so swiftly and completely. Well, he was an extremely wealthy young man, with resources equal to almost any task. She held up her wrist. Its smooth white skin was unmarked over the spot where her datacyst interface had once been. Not only was she a slave . . . she was a penniless slave.

She decided to stop thinking about Arbrand.

A long time later, a rattle came from the door. It swung open, to reveal a black-masked turnkey and a tall, red-haired man. The turnkey bowed the tall man inside, then stepped out and closed the door.

Arriangel observed her visitor with interest. She judged him a handsome man, perhaps even beautiful. He was muscular and moved with an energetic grace. His face struck her as unusual — a bit more strongly carved than was completely fashionable, with broad cheekbones, heavy brows, and deep-set amber eyes. His mouth was wide and smiling. His hair was of a peculiarly fiery shade, swept back from a high forehead.

"Will I do?" he asked, in a low, warm voice, and smiled even more broadly.

She looked away, embarrassed. "Are you here to buy me?"

"It's possible. Do you think you'd make a satisfactory purchase?"

She suddenly found the situation not at all amusing. It was one thing to sit alone in a comfortable room and muse abstractly on the institution of slavery. It was quite another to be confronted by a man who could own her, who could then do whatever he wished with her. — rent her out by the hour, sell her piece by piece to the clonehacks . . . or grind her up for beastfood if she displeased him.

Always before, in her dealings with others, *she* had made the rules — and this she had believed to be the natural order of the universe. She felt tears well up in her eyes. How could her circumstances have changed so abruptly and unfairly?

"Well, at least you can cry. That's a good sign. You'd be surprised to know how many human beings have lost that faculty." The man spoke kindly. Arriangel was cheered a bit by his apparent civility. Perhaps she should hope that he would be the one to purchase her.

She brightened, and tried to smile.

He laughed, but it wasn't a derisive sound, not at all. "You're an optimist, too," he said. "I like that."

He sat on her bed and regarded her without speaking. He seemed

perfectly at ease, as though he might watch her in that assessing manner for hours. His face reflected some pleasant but unidentifiable emotion, and she felt somehow challenged. "You know my name," she said. "Will you tell me yours?"

"Yes, of course," he said. "I've been rude, Arriangel. My name is Memphis."

She smiled at him, as warmly as she could. She suddenly felt herself on more familiar ground. She tossed back her hair, and leaned against the wall, thrusting out her hip, a maneuver that she knew shaped her body into an alluring line.

Memphis the slaver seemed to appreciate her skill. His gaze traveled slowly up and down, and when he was finished, his smile had some personal quality that it had not had before. Her confidence rose a bit.

She decided to attempt bribery. "I was a Citizen," she said.

"Oh?" Memphis seemed only mildly interested.

"Yes. If you buy me, I can guarantee you a fat profit. All you need do is contact my family." She looked at Memphis, quirked an eyebrow.

He continued to smile, but she had the feeling that she was failing to make herself understood. "Is that so?" he asked.

She was slightly annoyed. "Yes, it's so. My demifather is Larimone the Factor?" Memphis looked away, rubbed at his chin, as if struggling to remember.

She was quite irritated now. "Surely you don't pretend that you've never heard of Larimone?"

He stopped smiling, and fear stabbed through her. She couldn't seem to remember her new station. Would the slaver punish her?

But he didn't seem angry. "I remember now," he said soberly. "Larimone the Factor. Of course. He died in the Adjustment, and his corporation was redistributed."

She felt a breathless, uncertain grief squeeze her heart. "Larimone is dead? Truly dead? Oh, oh . . . When did it happen?"

Memphis drew a deep breath, looked unhappy. "I'm not sure. Four hundred years ago? Five hundred? I don't know. I'm sorry to have spoken so bluntly, but you must sooner or later learn the truth of your new circumstances."

Her muscles turned to jelly, and she slid down the wall. She hugged her legs to her body and hid her face. What had happened?

"The man who sold you to Specialties put you on ice for a long time. What was his name?" The slaver's sympathy seemed oddly genuine.

"Arbrand," she muttered.

"Arbrand. Yes. This sort of thing happens frequently in vengeful enslavements; it separates the victim from the possibility of rescue, and the passage of time works other unpleasant effects."

"I see," she said.

"I'm sorry."

Arriangel began to lose interest in the handsome slaver; why pretend that he saw her as a desirable woman? Now she had only one significant quality: merchantability.

Memfis went to one knee beside her and put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "It's not as bad as that, Arriangel. You still possess the strengths you had before: your beauty, your wit, your passion. You have everything but your freedom." He spoke as though he could read her mind. She wondered if he was of a telepathic race or whether her thoughts were simply identical to those of any other newly informed slave.

She tried to smile. He did seem kind, for a slaver. Then she wondered what darkness, what perversity his apparent kindness hid, and she became frightened. "If you buy me, what will you do with me?"

"Nothing terrible. My decision hinges on one question. Can you love?"

She was confused by the question. Memfis watched her with his beautiful amber eyes, apparently waiting for her to reply to his foolish question. "Can I love? Can't everyone?"

"Oh no; in fact, it's relatively few of us who can love. I'm not asking you if you can pretend to love; I'm not recruiting for a brothel. Though, if I don't buy you, a dozen whorebrokers will bid for you, I'm sure. Can you love?"

"I think so. I loved my father." It was still difficult for her to believe that so vital and forceful a man as Larimone could really be dead.

Memfis made an impatient chopping gesture with his hands. "No, no. That's not what I mean . . . not at all. I'm a specialist. I'm interested in the sort of love that runs hot from our hearts, that makes us burn for our lovers, that cooks us in our own passionate juices, until we're dizzy with desire. I'll ask you again: Can you love?"

The slaver's fine features seemed suddenly too taut; otherwise, she could not read his expression at all.

But, quite suddenly and perversely, she wanted to see a particular emotion on his face; she wanted to see those amber eyes grow warm. "Yes," she answered. "I can love."

A long, silent moment passed. Then Memphis smiled, an oddly intimate expression. "I think I will believe you, Arriangel."

SO HE bought her, and conducted her from the pens. When the outer doors clanged shut behind her, she felt a sudden lightening of her spirits, though perhaps she was foolish to feel so. Who knew what demands her new owner might make of her? But for the moment, he treated her with careful courtesy. He didn't attach a leash to the plastic collar around her neck, though he held her arm. She found the warm touch of his hand pleasant rather than restrictive, and she missed it when he released her to key open his tunnel car.

The car was luxurious, and she enjoyed this confirmation that Memphis possessed wealth, though she tried to tell herself to be sensible. She was just a possession now; she must learn how to deal with Memphis in a different way than she had dealt with any of the others.

When she was settled and the car was moving through the tunnels on its programmed course, Memphis spoke. "A drink? Smoke? Dust?" He gestured toward a small autobar, and it unfolded, to display a range of euphoriants.

"Perhaps some wine, something not too heavy . . .," she answered diffidently.

He seemed pleased by her answer, and he poured her a goblet of some pale, flowery wine, and then one for himself. "You're moderate, even after all this time on the ice. That's an attractive quality, Arriangel. We sleep, on the ice, but our bodies still accumulate needs . . . though more slowly."

She sipped at the wine, and gazed at him over the rim of her goblet, aware that she made an appealing picture. She waited for him to speak again, but evidently silence caused him no uneasiness. He simply watched her with appreciative eyes. She found that she could not match him at this game, and so she asked him the question that most occupied her. "What will you do with me?"

"You asked that before, and I didn't say, did I?"

"No."

He leaned back in his velvet-upholstered seat and looked at her over

his own goblet, in a gesture that was so clearly a mockery of hers that she flushed and set her goblet down, splashing a bit of wine on the polished surface of the table.

He laughed, without any discernible meanness, and it was so pleasant a sound that she was immediately disarmed. Then he set his own goblet aside and leaned forward. He took her hands between his and spoke earnestly. "Do you know what a love farmer is? No? Well, that's what I am, and between us, we'll grow love."

Her face must have betrayed some unreasonable hope, because he frowned and patted her hands gently. "That's not the way I should have said that, though you're a beautiful woman, and I would find you very intriguing under different circumstances. I didn't buy you for myself; your price was far too high for my personal pocket, and besides . . . I've never understood the appeal of purchased lovers. No, I bought you in my capacity as a representative of the corporation."

Her heart fell, and she looked down. "I see."

"Not yet," he said, and sighed. "Well . . . better if I defer a full explanation until we arrive. Things will be clearer then."

He would say no more, turning aside her questions with charming and inconsequential pleasantries.

They drove through dark tunnels for thousands of kilometers, the car shuddering with the speed of their passage. After a while her anxiety moderated to the point that she felt a bit sleepy. She forced herself to remain alert.

More than an hour later, the car slowed and dropped through several switchoff tunnels before finally arriving at a floodlit security gate. Memphis said to her, "We're here, Arriangel. This is where we'll do our work together."

The gate was large and strong-looking, and it displayed a bas-relief in gold, inset with platinum and iridium detail. The carving occupied an oval area and was divided into two parts by the gate's vertical seam. On the right was the face of a woman who wore a sweet, soft smile; her eyes were dreamy and mild, and she wore a garland of flowers about her head. On the left side was a man with grim features, whose hair snarled about his head with the energy of angry snakes. His mouth was a bitter line; his eyes bulged with mindless outrage.

The sign that arched over the gate said, *The Garden of Passions, Inc.* The letters were backlit with a red glow so deep it seemed almost black, the color of iron cooling in a forge.

Memfis touched a button, and the gate split down the center. The two faces slid aside, allowing the car to enter.

He helped her from the car, and she stepped out into an empty loading bay. "Come," he said. "I'll see you settled in your rooms, and tomorrow I'll explain the work we do here."

He took her through a series of deserted corridors, past a hundred closed doors, and in all that way, they met no one else. The corridors were very quiet, and Arriangel began to think morbid thoughts. Was the soundproofing very good at the love farm, and did tormented people scream behind all those closed doors?

Memfis again seemed to sense the direction of her speculations. "Please, Arriangel, don't be afraid. I promise you, nothing bad will happen to you tomorrow."

He seemed so sincere that she gave him her first unforced smile. He laughed. "Very good, Arriangel. You have a lovely smile, and I hope to see it a great many times before we're finished."

Finished? Her smile wavered — but only for an instant.

Her door seemed no different from all the others, but it opened when he pressed his palm to the ident plate. He ushered her inside with a courtly sweep of his arm, and she stepped over the threshold.

For all she could tell, she was in a luxurious apartment. The media room was decorated in an unfamiliar style, with warm colors and soft fabrics — she supposed fashions had changed over the centuries. There was a small kitchen, a large bedroom, and a well-appointed bathroom, in which sat a huge claw-foot bathtub with gold fixtures. In a shallow niche off the bedroom was the most ominous furnishing, a tall padded chair, equipped with heavy straps and a neural-inductance harness. Above it, set into the wall, was a large video screen. Memfis went to the chair and patted it affectionately. "This is the retroprobe. Here is where you'll do your work, Arriangel. Don't be afraid; I'll ask nothing unpleasant of you — just that you love. That doesn't sound so terrible, does it?"

"I don't understand," she said, biting her lip.

He touched her arm lightly, a gesture she found comforting, against her will. "I know. Tomorrow, when you're rested, I'll explain. Tonight don't

worry. You'll find everything you need; look for whatever you want in the usual places — food in the kitchen, clothes in the closet." He went out.

She didn't bother to try the door. She knew it would be locked.

She decided to take a bath, a long, hot bath. Perhaps she could soak away the uncertainties of her new life, if only for a while.

Arriangel slept poorly that night in her strange new bed, so far from her old life. Her dreams were muddy with frustration and anxiety; when she woke, she could remember nothing of them.

After she had visited the bathroom and made use of the combs and brushes and cosmetics she found there, a mech servitor emerged from its wallcloset and served her breakfast in the media room. She ate with little appetite.

Later she watched a performance on the holotank. A color dancer she had never heard of created crude, garish effects on a canvas of thousands of grimacing faces. The colors that cycled over the faces were depressing — pasty, clay-colored washes; sickly greens; dark, bloody crimsons. The music was stridently repetitive, and she soon turned it off. She wondered that the world had so deteriorated during her sleep on the ice.

Arbrand had chosen a vengeance even viler than she had at first understood.

She sat in silence for an hour, turning over her memories, worrying at them. When Memfis arrived, she had derived no insights from them. She still could not understand how she had come to be what she now was.

A chime announced his arrival, and she looked up, expecting her door to open without her volition, as it had when she was in the pens. After a moment she realized that Memfis was waiting for her permission.

Perhaps it was no more than a disarming gesture, but it made her feel better. "Enter," she said, running her hand quickly over her hair.

Memfis came in, smiling his reassuring smile. "Ah," he said, clearly delighted. "How lovely you look this morning. No wonder you've been so often loved, Arriangel."

There was an odd inflection to his voice, but she could not decide what it meant. Still, he wasn't at all threatening, and she smiled warmly, pleased to see him.

He rubbed his hands together briskly, as if to warm them, then extended one to her. "Come along. It's time for you to learn about the work

you'll do here."

She put her hand in his, and he lifted her gently to her feet. He must have seen the fear in her face, though she tried to hide it. "No, no, there's nothing to be afraid of, as I've said before. In fact, almost everyone wishes to have the opportunity you're about to receive."

"They do?"

"Oh yes. How many of us would not go back into our pasts and change things, if we could?" He laughed. "No, I have no time machine — none exist, so far as I know."

He drew her into the bedroom, where the tall chair stood. At his touch on a wall-mounted dataslate, the chair slid forward, and the neutral harness lifted up and out of the way. "Will you sit?" he asked.

She could not have said why she was so afraid. Despite its appearance, suggestive of the restraints employed by low-tech torturers in holodramas, the chair's fabric was clean and new, its plastic surfaces unmarred, the straps wide and padded. "Please . . .," she whispered.

"All right," he said, apparently not annoyed. "I'll sit. You watch."

He made himself comfortable in the chair. When he was ready, he nodded, and the straps curled around his chest and over his wrists and ankles. Simultaneously, the neural harness descended, until its black plastic hood obscured his face . . . except for his mouth, which still smiled for a moment longer.

Then his mouth fell into repose, and above the chair the screen came to life, veils of random color swirling.

When the screen cleared, she saw a forest scene — ancient gnarled trees growing amid mossy black boulders, through which a narrow brook poured. From the frosty, directionless light, she assumed she was watching one of the ecosims to be found in the wealthier enclaves of Dilvermoon, a little bit of carefully designed wilderness deep under the steel shell of the artificial planet.

For a moment the scene was static, and then it came to life, the water moving, tree limbs tossing in a moaning wind. A bright green databar slid across the bottom of the screen, flashing the words "MNEMONIC VALIDITY: CONFIRMED." At the same instant, a sensie field touched her, and she shivered. The wind was cold, and some fearful emotion rode on it. The room grew misty around her, though the flashing databar

remained clear, and she was drawn into the screen's viewpoint.

The viewpoint panned, and she saw, standing beside a deep pool, a little boy, a child who seemed instantly familiar, though she was sure she had never seen him before. He was perhaps nine years old, pale-skinned, with hair of a familiar fiery color. He was smiling at her, but there was nothing pleasant about that smile. It was too wide and too knowing, and, in some subtle and disturbing way, quite dreadful.

"Come," the little boy said. "Let's see who's better."

The voice was that of a child, but Arriangel repressed a shudder of disgust.

She recognized Memfis — the small features were unmistakable. Or was it him? She saw some unendurably hateful quality in the child . . . though it was difficult to put her finger on exactly what was so awful.

The boy held the loop of a leash in his hand, and he gave it a jerk. A small, miserable-looking creature came slowly from behind a boulder. It was so hunched over that she took a moment to recognize it as a merlind, a bioengineered pet that had been popular in the enclaves when she was a child. Its body incorporated a malleable alien protein, and its entertainment value derived from the fact that its physical structure could be altered almost instantly. The boy drew a control module from his pocket.

Her viewpoint spoke, and again she caught the resonances of disgust and fear. "No, Tafilis. I don't want to play that anymore." The voice was also childish and almost identical to the first boy's, except that it seemed sweetly troubled, and not at all monstrous.

"But you will." The awful child tapped at his controller, and his merlind straightened up and began to change.

Arriangel felt a distracting degree of confusion. Her viewpoint called the child Tafilis, not Memfis. What was happening? She shook her head.

The databar still flashed the same message.

The merlind had begun as a small, chubby animal with nappy brown fur and large, dark eyes. Its body elongated, the fur retracted, and hard blue scales surfaced on its skin. Its jaws enlarged and lengthened, and it hissed, opening a mouth full of long yellow teeth. It sprouted a crest of stiff green spines and a segmented insectile tail tipped with a poison-oozing stinger.

"No, really, Tafilis, please . . . I don't want to," her viewpoint said in a trembling voice. The sensie field squeezed Arriangel between loathing and terror. She could feel her viewpoint's fear, a twisting hand in her belly.

"You think I give a shit what you want, Memfis?" Tafilis laughed horribly, and the creature he had made strained at the leash. "Come on, I'll give you a slow count to twenty to do your merlind, then I turn Bones loose. Hurry!"

Her viewpoint looked down at the furry, innocuous merlind that cowered between his legs. "That's not enough time, Tafilis!"

"Tough. One, two. . . ."

Her viewpoint fumbled out his control module, punched at the screen with clumsy fingers.

". . . fourteen, sixteen. . . ."

Her viewpoint's merlind was changing, growing bands of armor and long claws, but too slowly, too slowly. Its liquid eyes still looked up at its master in fear and confusion.

". . . eighteen, nineteen. . . ."

"Wait; we're not ready. . . ."

"Twenty!" Tafilis bent forward to press the release of the leash, and her viewpoint was still not ready.

"No!" But then a disorienting calm descended on her viewpoint, who put his hand in his pocket and pulled out the splinter gun he'd taken from his mother's armory that morning.

With the part of her self that was still Arriangel, she noticed that the databar had turned a brilliant crimson, and was flashing a new message, "MNEMONIC VALIDITY: DIVERGING."

Her viewpoint pointed the gun at the monster. As it sprang toward his still-helpless pet, he fired. The spinning wires strummed the air and cut the creature into rags. The remnants blew back and splashed into the pool, still squirming.

Tafilis glared, face dead white, little spots of angry red high on his cheekbones. "You cheated, you little snot. I'll make you sorry for that."

"I'm already sorry. But I couldn't let you kill Jackrat, like you did Tobita. Mama will buy you another merlind; don't be mad."

Her viewpoint approached the pool and looked down into the water. Streamers of blood flowed lazily with the current. The ripples died away, and she saw a serious little face reflected there, identical but not the same as the horrible Tafilis.

"Memfis," she whispered. "You have a twin? Poor Memfis."

THE SCREEN went dark, and the hood rose from Memphis's face. He seemed a bit pale, and sweat glistened on his forehead.

"Sorry," he said. "I wouldn't have picked that memory."

"The boy . . . that was your brother? Your twin?"

"Yes. He's my partner now. We two are the principal shareholders in the corporation."

"He's *here*?" She felt a shudder of dread pass through her. That monster? Here?

Memphis smiled, a bit ruefully. "I'm afraid so. He's talented in his way; anyway, he's my brother, so I must put up with him. Well, enough about Tafilis. Did you understand the retroprobe — what was happening?"

"I'm not sure."

"I'll explain. That was a memory of my childhood — up to a point. Then it became a fantasy." His eyes darkened, and he looked down. "I didn't have the splinter gun that day, and Bones killed Jackrat. Like it killed the next two merlinds I got, until I learned not to want them anymore."

"That's terrible," she said.

"It was a long time ago, Arriangel." He shook himself and smiled. "But the point is, the retroprobe lets us go back into our memories and change something — a poor decision, a bit of bad luck, an attitude, perhaps. Something. And then we see how it might have been. How it might have been. . . . Do you see?"

"I understand. But . . . what does this have to do with me?" She was honestly puzzled. Her life had been remarkably free of regrets; except for her enslavement, she could think of nothing she would change.

That look of detached compassion fell over his beautiful features again. She was abruptly very uncomfortable. "Why do you look at me that way?"

He took her hand gently. "Arriangel. Think about this. You've been lucky enough to be loved many times. Why so many?"

"I don't know what you mean." And she didn't, but she sensed a criticism in his questions.

"I mean, what happened? Why did you never choose to stay with your lovers?"

"What an odd question. No one stays together forever, do they?"

Memphis laughed softly, a sound of sad amusement. "Remember what I

said before I bought you, Arriangel. That very few can love."

"But I loved! I did! It's not my fault that something always happened to change things." She was astonished to find her eyes full of tears.

"Well," he said in a soothing voice. "We can make it right, under the probe."

The tears leaked down her cheeks. "But why? Why are you doing this?"

He seemed surprised, and then contrite. "You're right. I really haven't explained yet. Listen, then. I'm an artist; my form is making love." He smiled at her expression. "Oh no, not the physical act, Arriangel. No. That's both too subtle and too limited for me; it's also too crowded a field. Everyone's an expert; isn't that the case? No. What I do is different.

"I record great loves; great and genuine loves. I have few competitors and fewer peers. And love is always in fashion, always marketable. Few can truly love, but everyone is curious, and what they're most curious about is this: how does it feel to be truly loved? So I find a person like you, someone who is beautiful and sweet and demonstrably lovable. And then I mine the memories of their greatest love. Finally I assemble those memories into a sensic chip; it becomes a distillation of one of the strongest experiences humans can have."

"But . . . why me? You just said that I've never loved." She felt a sudden hot pang of resentment, and her eyes went dry. "At least, not by your standards."

"It doesn't matter — or so I hope. You have all the necessary qualities, Arriangel. You were wealthy, and so, to most of the people in the pangalac worlds, your life was already a dream. Therefore you had the leisure to indulge in romance. You were born beautiful; you were always beautiful — and you know it, which gives an unmistakable flavor to your mind, a taste the rest of us hunger for." He kissed her hand, a courtly, artificial gesture. "I don't know yet what went wrong, but we'll find it and fix it, under the probe."

"I don't know," she said, in an uncertain voice.

"No, no. Don't fear. And remember, if you can give me what I ask, I'll give you back your freedom."

She was afraid to believe him, and her distrust must have been obvious.

He laughed. "There's no altruism involved, Arriangel. When I publish the chip, you'll be famous. When you're free, your fame will feed the chip's

fame, and the chip's will feed yours. The corporation will profit from that interaction, of course. Publicity is all-important, even for artists — if they don't want to starve for their art." His expression darkened, as if he found that reality unpalatable.

When he was gone, she waited in the probe.

The brothers sat in the control room. On the screen, Arriangel sat up straight in the retroprobe, a look of repressed terror on her lovely features.

"You might have chosen a less frightening memory for my demonstration," said Memfis.

Tefilis shrugged. "No great harm done, eh?" He turned to Memfis. "Anyway, she's a poor choice for your purposes, Brother. My wager on that."

Memfis touched the dataslate, and the hood of the probe lowered over Arriangel's face. "Your wager? How much?"

Tafilis grinned, a predatory glitter of white teeth. "Six weeks' profits on your half of the operation and a share of your stock to me, if you fail with her. The same to you, if I'm wrong. And just to keep you honest, you get only three tries."

"Done," said Memfis carelessly, all his attention now given to the probe's primary screen.

"Ahh . . .," said Tafilis in cheerful satisfaction. "You're never going to win this bet; I wonder why you keep making it. One day our legacy will all be mine. But don't worry, Brother. I'll always keep a place for you."

She felt the mask descend. When it covered her eyes, she felt a brief wrench in her senses, and then she was elsewhere, long ago. . . .

She found herself walking alone down a familiar corridor, hearing the sounds of her classmates settling into their learning environments. She was a bit late, but not anxious. Her teachers would wait, and none would dare speak harshly to her.

She was thirteen, intrigued by the changes in her body, by the process of becoming a woman. Her school was a fine one, congenial in every respect, located in an exclusive downlevel habitat, and her life was perfect. She would never be one of those awkward adolescents, unsure of her worth.

She paused at the corridor junction, and admired herself in the mirror

that covered the wall there. Her body paint was just the right shade of spring green, and her gownner had skillfully accented the swell of her new breasts with a soft russet shadow. Her pale hair, twisted into an elaborate love knot, spiraled down her back. On her feet were silver-scaled slippers, with delicate red garnet buttons.

"Perfect, just perfect," she said in honest delight. She performed a graceful half-pirouette, and was startled to see an older boy watching her with solemn approval.

He immediately turned and walked purposefully away — to her puzzlement and annoyance.

She sniffed and went on, somewhat subdued.

Time slipped and skidded her into the next day. She was talking with her friend Loyaluiz. "I turned around, and he just pretended he hadn't been ogling me. What a geekly loon."

Loyaluiz, Arriangel's current best friend, was a plain girl. Were it not for her esthetically conservative parents, she would have already had herself scuplted into Arriangel's twin. But she compensated for her ordinary looks with a lively character and quick intelligence, so that she had almost as many friends and admirers as Arriangel.

"Who was he?" Loyaluiz asked.

"I don't know."

"What'd he look like?"

Arriangel considered. "A few years older than us. Not tall. Dark-skinned, with straight black hair. Good features, probably, if he smiled."

"His clothes?"

"I didn't notice what he was wearing."

Loyaluiz smiled secretively. "You never notice; you're too rich. But I bet his clothes were a bit shabby. I think you're talking about Garso-Yao, this season's poverty project." Every year the school gave a scholarship to a deserving child from one of Dilvermoon's many Howlytowns. A few of these went on to distinguished careers; most returned to the dark corridors.

Arriangel was immediately interested. She had never had a poor admirer; in fact, she didn't know any poor people. What would it be like to have a poor lover? The year before, when she had first shown an interest in the subject, her demifather had retained an expensive and exclusive sexual-education service for her. The attractive young men and women

the service had sent to her home had pleased her, but their detached skills had begun to pall. Was it true that poor people made love with an exciting degree of crudity? Were their simple pleasures the stronger for their simplicity? But . . . perhaps Garso-Yao was *not* her admirer — why had he left so precipitately?

"Did I frighten him away?" she wondered aloud.

Loyaluiz laughed. "Maybe. Or maybe he just doesn't have time for you. I hear he's a serious prole. Studies all the time. Full of determination. You know."

"I guess. . . ."

Time whirled her ahead a week.

In the sensorium she found Garso-Yao taking the datasoak. It was late; they were almost alone in the vast, low-ceilinged room. Only a few cubicles showed lights, indicating the presence of other dutiful students. She stood beside his cubicle, looking in at him. He reclined in the datasoak's couch. His eyes were closed, his expression far away, soft with some vicarious emotion. She wondered where he was, what he was seeing. His mouth was well shaped, and behind his lips gleamed strong teeth, very white. She slipped into the cubicle and touched him, running her fingers along the sharp curves of the cheekbones that lay under the dark, taut skin. There was something unbearably intimate about this contact, enhanced in some mysterious way by his unconscious acceptance.

She raised her eyes and peeked over the cubicle partition. No one moved in the hall. The proctor was gone from her glass booth at the far end; probably gone to fetch a cup of stim against the long hours remaining on her shift.

Garso-Yao wore a white shirt, open at the throat. His chest was almost grotesquely deep, as though his ancestors had come to Dilvermoon from some thin-air world. She slipped her hands under the shirt, touched his collarbones, embedded in flat bands of muscle.

She took another glance about the hall, then shrugged off her blouse. She straddled Garso-Yao, heart thumping, amused and frightened by her own daring, and unpeeled the contact strip that sealed his shirt. She had no clear idea of what she intended to do; she functioned in a state of thoughtless impulse, a familiar and comfortable mode.

What now? She really didn't want to wake him; she wanted only to add a bit of substance to her unformed fantasies. She leaned forward and lay

her breasts against his chest, her head in the hollow of his shoulder.

He had a faint, slightly sweaty smell, not at all offensive. She closed her eyes and rested more of her weight against him.

Memfis watched from her eyes, until she closed them. Then he directed the probe to simulate a detached viewpoint, which he raised until the two of them just filled the screen, her slender, pale body outlined by his darkness. Here he paused for a moment. He resumed the pullback, continued to raise the simulated viewpoint, and eventually Arriangel and Garso-Yao were just a shadowy dot in the geometric maze of the sensorium, the only two who shared a cubicle in all that vast, empty space.

"Nice shot," said Tafilis, the usual sneer embedded in his voice.

Memfis ignored him. Arriangel had given him this image; but it was his talent to see how the significance of the moment could be made clear to those who might someday experience this love . . . or as clear as it could be to those who could not love. Tafilis was one of these unfortunates, but he was a good hater.

"Memfis," said Tafilis, "she's only a child, and a remarkably callow one at that. Why bother with so immature an experience? What can it ripen into, but some sort of pathetic puppy love?"

"You have your area of expertise; I have mine," Memfis said, without turning from the screen. He manipulated the probe's slate, and the scene in the sensorium faded away.

"Yes, of course," said Tafilis, undisturbed. He got up and went away.

ON A parallel sensory track, Arriangel felt Garso-Yao stir as he emerged from the datasoak. She knew an instant's dismay; she hadn't meant to lie against him for such a long time. She raised her head so that she could see his face clearly.

Before she could pull away, his eyelids fluttered and he woke. His eyes glowed with an unfocused shine; then they cleared, and he realized he wasn't alone. He tried to jerk back, and at the same time, his arms clamped her tight, in some sort of defensive reflex. She couldn't breathe.

They both lay motionless for a long moment. He looked up at her, and his arms gradually released her. She didn't pull back; she stared into his eyes, allowed herself to soften against him. His dark face flushed slightly.

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She imagined herself in his place — how the heat of her small breasts would feel to him, the pressure of her knees gripping his hips. What was he thinking?

His eyes — which at first had seemed like hard black stones, unknowable — changed. Something loosened; a lock fell open. His arms tightened around her again.

Arriangel felt a new sort of exhilaration. "Yes," she said. "But not here."

Memfis keyed Arriangel's timeline forward a week. She stood in the public room of her suite, naked and beautifully rumpled with lovemaking, arms folded truculently. Garso-Yao hesitated by the door, looking uncomfortable.

Memfis panned the detached viewpoint over the luxurious furnishings and elaborate toys that filled the room. He softened the focus, so that the appointments softened into a flowing abstraction of rich colors and jeweled lights.

Arriangel spoke a sharp syllable. "Why?"

Memfis slipped back behind her eyes.

She couldn't understand Garso-Yao's reluctance. She loved him, but she couldn't understand him. She was rich; he was poor — these were irrefutable facts, so why couldn't he accept her assistance gracefully?

He shrugged. "I've explained, Arriangel. I thank you for your offer, but if I take your money, I'll be weakened. Anyway, you shouldn't worry; my needs are simple, and the school meets them well enough."

"Well," she said, exasperated. "I suppose . . . though I can't see how decent clothing and a good dataslate would corrupt you fatally. But why won't you live here with me?"

He looked about, a glance that seemed to inventory her many comforts. "I can't risk it. I might become used to . . . all this." He shook his head. "I know it seems foolish to you. But where I was born, only the strongest prosper." He shivered, and for a moment his face took on a curious expression, compounded of fear and nausea. "It's a terrible place, Arriangel. I can't go back. I won't jeopardize my opportunity here." His expression softened. "I'm already taking a great risk, by loving you, by coming here at all. I should insist that you come to my cubicle instead, but I've come to want you too much, and you might refuse."

Then he left.

Idiot, she thought . . . but the thought was tempered with fondness. She found Garso-Yao vastly interesting — it was as if she loved an alien, so different was he from her other friends. He would tell her strange stories of his bizarre childhood in the streets of Howlytown; he could sing unfamiliar songs in a sweet, resonant tenor; he was exciting in bed, with his untrained enthusiasm and his unforced gestures of affection.

She felt a pleasant wonder at her own daring in choosing so unusual a lover. "You're a rarity," she whispered, addressing herself as much as Garso-Yao.

Memfis shifted her recall onto a parallel trial vector and cycled them through the next month. His sensors warned that a major decision point approached; all over his board, warnings flashed.

He watched her confer with her friend Loyaluiz.

"What's the matter with him?" she asked.

"He's afraid he'll have to go back to Howlytown; didn't he say so?" Loyaluiz seemed rather indifferent to Arriangel's complaints. Observing the scene, Memfis saw that her indifference masked a small envy: that Arriangel had once again been more precocious than Loyaluiz, had been first to experiment with that ancient emotion, love.

"So what can I do?"

Loyaluiz shrugged. "He fears poverty, right? Settle an endowment on him, so he can live well forever, no matter how his education turns out."

Arriangel smiled. "Of course! Why didn't I think of that?"

"You're too rich; you swim in wealth like a fish in water, and you never notice what you swim in."

A few days later, Memfis watched Arriangel and Garso-Yao in bed, tumbled in the sheets, sharing a glass of sweet blond wine.

"I have a surprise," she said, setting the glass aside and taking a small dataslate from the bedside counter. "Here."

He took it carefully, a mulish look settling over his face. "I can't accept this, Arriangel."

"Not the slate, silly. Look!" She touched the slate, and it lit up with the details of the endowment she had created for him.

His eyes grew large, and his mouth fell open.

"Now you're rich, too, and you'll never have to go back to Howlytown,

He experimented with expensive civilized vices: wireheading, pseudodeath, beastling.

no matter what happens," she said. "Isn't it perfect?"

He looked up at her, speechless. His expression wasn't entirely satisfying to Arriangel. Certainly he was surprised, but she saw some deep wound there, too, and how had that happened?

Tafilis had returned. "Oh yes," he said, looking over his brother's shoulder. "Her first big mistake . . . but if it hadn't been so, she'd have found another way. I know her; she's one of mine."

"No," said Memphis, certain that for once his brother was wrong.

To verify his judgment, he tracked the decline of Arriangel's first romance.

Garso-Yao tried to give the money back, but Arriangel had been clever enough to make the transfer of funds irreversible, and the principal untouchable.

Memfis watched Garso-Yao accept his changed fortunes. At first, this was satisfying to Arriangel; Garso-Yao spent most of his vast new income on charity, on wildly eccentric gifts for her, on entertainments for new friends.

But then Garso-Yao slowly came to understand that the obsessive drives that had shaped his existence had become irrelevant.

He became a very strange young man.

He left school, of course. He experimented with the most expensive civilized vices: wireheading, pseudodeath, beastling. He took an apartment in Bo'eme, a quarter frequented by decadent artists and their sycophants. He dressed with extravagant tastelessness; he had his body tattooed with grim images — screaming faces, broken corpses, instruments of torment — so that Arriangel felt a growing reluctance to take him into her bed. Gradually he ceased to be interesting, and began to be an embarrassment to her.

The only thing about him that didn't change was Garso-Yao's devotion to Arriangel. When she changed her school and her lockplates and refused to see him, he committed his final act of *gaucherie*.

His cronies found him dangling from a silken cord outside her security

port one night. She had gone away for a few days, and so was spared the sight of his swollen black face.

At first, she was melodramatically inconsolable, but eventually he faded into a slightly regretful, romantic memory.

"Cold," said Tafilis.

"She was very young," Memfis said wearily.

"Sure."

Loyaluiz shrugged. "He fears poverty, right? Settle an endowment on him, so he can live well forever, no matter how his education turns out."

Arriangel felt a sudden twist in her perceptions, a feeling of displacement. She rubbed at her temples, and the sensation faded. "What?" she asked.

"An endowment. Then money won't be an issue between you."

Arriangel looked at her friend, and saw something in her unremarkable face that she had never noticed before. Envy? Slyness?

"I'm not sure that would be a good idea," she said slowly. "I'd have to think about it."

Loyaluiz curled her thin lip. "Miserliness? From you? I can hardly believe it."

"That's not it; what a foolish notion." Arriangel regarded Loyaluiz with new eyes, and decided she didn't like what she saw, at all.

Memfis watched the screen as the processors remade the reality recorded in Arriangel's memories.

For a while all went well. Garso-Yao continued his education and his devotion to her, and Arriangel believed herself to be settling deeper into the love of her life.

A month passed in pseudorecall. Events began to sour. The two of them quarreled more frequently. Garso-Yao still told his strange stories, but he was starting to repeat himself. She resented the time he spent at his studies; what use was it to be young and beautiful and in love if she could never go where envious eyes could see her?

Arriangel's mouth more and more often fell into a pout of discontent, and Garso-Yao grew thin and too intense.

"Oh yes," said Tafilis.

Memfis tried to tweak the track back onto a smooth course. The processors approached overload, and Tafilis laughed. "That's cheating," he said.

"Shut up," said Memfis without heat. "It's only the first try. What did you expect?"

That evening, after Arriangel had bathed, dined, and rested, Memfis came to her apartment and showed her the recording. They sat together on the couch, not quite touching, and watched a sensie screen that descended from the ceiling.

"You'll find this interesting . . . and perhaps instructive," said Memfis in a colorless voice.

When she saw the first images of Garso-Yao, and watched her younger self lie against him in the datasoak cubicle, tears clouded her vision. She felt a pang of bittersweet remembrance.

"That was so long ago," she said. "I had forgotten."

"Not at all," said Memfis. "It was all there, just under the surface." He seemed a bit haggard, and dark smudges underlined his eyes.

Her heart twinged with sympathy.

Arriangel shook her head, annoyed with herself. Memfis was a *slaver*. He was exploiting her most private memories; why should she care about him? She gave all her attention to the screen.

When the recording reached the point of revision, during the scene with Loyaluiz, she opened her mouth to say that it hadn't happened that way.

Then she noticed that the on-screen databar was flashing a new message. "MNEMONIC VALIDITY: DIVERGING," it read.

"Oh," she said.

HE WATCHED.

On this pseudotrack a little more time passed before things went wrong, and some odd twist occurred in her perception, so that she felt an illogical gratitude for the few extra sweetnesss that the artificial memories showed her, for the fragments of extra time spent happily in Garso-Yao's arms.

But then it began to come apart, though not as disastrously as it had in reality. This time, Garso-Yao did not kill himself when she left him; he

used his frustrated passion to augment the force of his ambition and became a grim young man indeed.

Still, she was comforted.

"At least he didn't die," she whispered when the recording was finished.

Memfis looked at her. Some poorly concealed emotion burned through the weariness. Disgust? "Arriangel. Garso-Yao still rots in his grave, victim of a careless child's whim and his own weakness." He gestured at the screen, his hands trembling. "Do you think this is real? It's just a plausible lie — though in this case not a very pretty one. Or salable."

She felt an answering anger. "We loved well for a while; very well indeed. You make it seem as if it were nothing. You're wrong, even if it didn't last forever. When he died, my heart ached for months . . . and I guess it still does. Anyway, if you didn't like the way it went, why didn't you just keep changing it?"

Memfis shook his head, and now he only looked sad and tired. "I would have liked to, Arriangel, but past a certain point, the processors can't keep up with the complexity of the changes. I can redraw one significant event, sometimes two, but after that I have to let events run their course. If I don't, the processors overload and begin to strip away the gestalt of the redrawn reality, trying to free enough capacity to maintain the track. Eventually the track becomes a cartoon, if I push it far enough."

"I see," she said.

"Besides," he went on, as if she hadn't spoken. "I have no illusions about my skill and my machines. I rely on my subjects to make my art. I'm not like those love farmers who attempt to synthesize their characters from thin air, then put them through their wooden paces, jerking their strings and putting words in their mouths, phony light in their dead eyes. Such arrogance, to believe that they understand love so well that their feeble imaginings have any beauty, any resonance. Art is observation, not creation; what can anyone create that hasn't been done a trillion times before?"

His eyes kindled with a brilliant, brittle rage, and she was once again afraid of him. She edged away, crossing her arms under her breasts and looking away.

"No, no," he said, in a voice abruptly soft and low. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't be so harsh. If Garso-Yao is dead, then so is that young Arriangel — and she was only foolish, not hateful. I believe that we can learn from our

mistakes, that we can change and become capable of love." She glanced up and saw his face naked for an instant, undisguised by his usual armor of urbane confidence. "I must believe this," he whispered, looking down, his hands knotted together in his lap.

She wanted to throw her arms around him and give him what comfort she could . . . but she didn't quite dare . . . and then she grew angry with herself.

A silence grew between them, until she thought she would smother in it. But finally he spoke. "We'll try again in a few days. I didn't choose well, I'm afraid. Next time we'll do better; I'll research more carefully, think it through. We'll do fine, I'm sure." He patted her hand and gave her his marvelous smile.

She nodded.

"Meanwhile," said Memphis. "We'll rest. I can show you some of the amusements we have here, if you like."

"Please," she said, concealing eagerness. She found the prospect of his continued companionship interesting. She was no longer a young girl, to fall instantly into the fiery embrace of infatuation, but still . . . there was something intriguing about the slaver. No, she corrected herself, he wasn't actually a slaver; he was an artist whose work required slaves. She frowned. Why, exactly, was that so?

"May I ask you about your work?"

"Certainly," he said. "Though some questions I prefer not to answer."

"Oh. Well, can you tell me why you use slaves in your art? Why not chronicle the loves of free Citizens?"

He still smiled, though he looked a bit uneasy. "Several reasons, Arriangel. One is economic; Citizens would demand too large a proportion of the gross profits in compensation for their contribution — and ours is an expensive craft. Furthermore, many folk look upon their loves as private; they feel reluctance to make their passions public. I don't understand this myself . . . why not glorify your love?" He seemed momentarily sad. "Had I a great love, the universe would know of it."

Arriangel found this very strange. He had no lover? Incomprehensible, unless his standards were impossibly high. Perhaps he mutated into some hideous creature at frequent intervals.

He continued. "Also . . . those who love greatly are frequently neither beautiful nor wealthy, and if I wish to find a market for my work, I must

remember that most of my patrons don't care to experience the passions of homely nobodies." He looked pensive. "It's a pity, of course."

"I see." She leaned against his shoulder, enjoying his warmth. "And I suppose that the most important Citizens would be least likely to allow such an invasion of their privacy, and would ask more money, too."

"You understand," he said ruefully.

"I guess. So, why do you work only with memories? Why don't you just seek out two beautiful people 'who can love,' as you say, and bring them together?"

He gave her an odd look, as though she had said something both clever and discomfiting. "There are problems in that approach," he said carefully. "For one, those who can love have generally already found someone to cherish, and would be unwilling to rearrange their emotional commitments for my convenience. Besides, love is such an illogical thing. Who can say why love begins, or why it chooses the objects it chooses? My subjects might very well despise each other. It would be an expensive risk."

"I suppose."

"There's another reason why I prefer to work with slaves — if they're capable of love, they've usually been separated from their dear ones."

"Oh."

He seemed uncomfortable, and his smile faded away. He didn't speak for a minute, and she felt no urge to interrupt the silence.

"Tell me, Arriangel," he finally said. "Would you rather be in a downlevel brothel?"

"No," she answered. She thought it an unnecessarily cruel question, even though no cruelty showed in his face.

The following days passed in a simulation of normality. While that time lasted, Arriangel could almost believe that she was the guest of some wealthy, reclusive friend.

Accompanied by a tiny, unobtrusive mech guide, she was free to roam the vast compound — though many doors were closed to her, and she could only imagine what went on behind the steel.

She spent much time in the well-equipped gymnasium, using the devices there to restore her body to perfection. After several vigorous hours, her regrets would surrender to the anesthesia of exhaustion, and

she could be happy for a while.

Nearby she found a self-service euphorium, but she felt no interest in the drugs it could dispense. Down the corridor from the gymnasium was an alcove full of sexual toys, including autonomous simulacra of various sorts, which winked and smiled at her from their preservative niches. The glass door was locked against her. For some reason she was reluctant to ask Memphis why that was so; perhaps she feared he would say that his purposes were well served by her growing sexual frustration. In all her long life, she had never been without ready companionship, and now she had another resentment to bear.

Still, late at night in her empty bed, she couldn't help thinking about Memphis and his beauty, so that her annoyance was increasingly tinged with involuntary lust.

She swam in the large bubble pool, luxuriating in the warm, supporting water. One of her favorite diversions was a zero-gravity, intelligent maze, which reordered itself before each of her many attempts to penetrate to its heart. Its narrow tubes were spun from an empathic plastic, and as she flew slowly through the branchings and turnings, the plastic altered color in coruscating washes — and sang a low, wordless, ever-changing music.

She discovered that her holotank could be tuned to the Dystan dream, that vast tangle of story and myth, and found that the melodramatic lives of the dream-dwellers still held the same fascination for her, even in her changed circumstances. Over the hundreds of years, her old favorites had been replaced by new characters, but the dream was as vivid as before.

She was surprised to learn that Memphis was also a watcher, and they spent several evenings together in her rooms, in the glow of the dream-screen. He spoke little, and she found undignified the thought of making friendly overtures to the slaver, so that the evenings passed uncomfortably. Still, it seemed more interesting than watching alone.

Memfis favored the doings of the lowland wizards who held fiefs at the south end of the dream's greatest island. Currently, a handsome woman of unknown ancestry and motives was wreaking havoc in princely hearts throughout the region.

In the spell of the dream, Memphis seemed to grow younger and less driven.

"Oh yes," he said one night, sitting beside her on her couch. "They know how to love there. If only I could reach into the dream and steal that

one." The black-haired dream-dweller lay in a glade, naked on her cloak, her white body dappled with sunbeams. She drank green wine and listened to a young prince with a lute. From the forest a huge, hideous troll watched in fascination; clearly, significant events were in the offing.

Arriangel felt vaguely insulted. Here she sat, at least as beautiful as the dream-dweller — within easy reach and perhaps even willing. In her old life, she might have attempted to demonstrate her desirability; now she bit her lip and spoke peevishly. "That's silly," she said. "She was bred to her role by the dream designers; she acts as she must. She's not real, in the way we are."

Memfis turned and looked at her, appraisal flickering behind his eyes. "You're right," he said. "Sometimes I lose my perspective. The dream-dwellers are too simple and direct for my purposes — after all, what's love without introspection?"

She shrugged, still irritated. He got up and left, and didn't return again.

She came to the conclusion that she had been foolish.

In all her wanderings about the compound, she met no other slaves, and sometimes she wondered if she and Memfis were alone in the compound. She grew attached to this pleasant delusion, until the day she met Tafilis.

Arriangel was returning to her rooms from the bubble pool, still naked and wet, toweling her hair vigorously. She followed her mech guide blindly around a corner, and almost ran into Tafilis.

The towel still obscured her vision, and for an instant she thought he was Memfis. But he stepped close and touched her at the waist. He ran his hand up her flank, detouring to brush his fingers along the swell of her breast. "Very nice," he said.

She stepped back and wrapped the towel about her. He laughed an awful laugh, full of ugly merriment.

"You must be Tafilis," she said, struggling to conceal her alarm.

"None other!" Tafilis resembled Memfis to a remarkable degree — they even dressed alike — but the physical resemblance seemed only to heighten the differences in their characters. The grace she found attractive in Memfis seemed in Tafilis a spiderish agility. The smile that in Memfis seemed so unforced and direct was in Tafilis a rictus of gloating — yet the shape was the same. She shook her head, confused. Had she imagined those virtues in Memfis? It seemed suddenly possible, looking at his twin.

He laughed again, but then the smile went out like a switched-off lamp. "I know what you're thinking," he said. "You wonder how we can be so different, my brother and I. I'll tell you a secret: we're not so different."

"Oh?"

"Indeed. Oh, he prattles about love . . . and he plays the mooncalf well — I'll give him that. But he's a fool. *Love*. . . What is love? It's a phantom, a fashion. No one knows what it is, and it's never the same thing twice. What sort of passion is that? A jellyfish passion, fit only to comfort weaklings. Memphis struggles to trap the wily creature, but he never succeeds, never. All he can do is take whatever poor thing he's netted and make it look pretty." Tafilis snorted derisively.

She tried to edge past him, to return to the relative security of her rooms, but he moved to block her, darting out his hand and gripping her shoulder.

"I, on the other hand, am very good at my craft, which leads to the major difference between me and my dear brother. I always succeed, while he always fails." He released her, but kept his hand on her, touching her collarbone with delicate fingers. "Would you like to know which of the passions I cultivate?"

She nodded jerkily, afraid to speak.

He dropped his hand and turned away. "Hate," he said, in an oddly soft voice. "The deepest passion, the most obdurate passion, the passion everyone can understand." He glanced back at her as he walked away, and just for a moment, his smile seemed identical to the smile of his handsome brother.

"Again?" asked Tafilis. "You're so earnest, Brother. I wish I had your devotion. Of course, my job is vastly easier than yours — this I freely admit!"

Memphis ignored his brother's mockery, giving his attention to Arriangel's memories, searching among the strands of remembrance for just the right place to begin his next attempt.

"Ah well," said Tafilis. "I have faith in you. . . . You won't succeed in your own estimation, but your chips will be salable, as always — and that's the important thing. Tell me: when will you admit defeat?"

Memphis glanced up at his brother's vulpine features, and suppressed a shudder. His loathing for Tafilis threatened to rise up and overwhelm him, but he fought it back. How could he expect to cultivate love and faith in Arriangel when he was himself so full of hate and despair? He rubbed

his hands over his face and took a deep, calming breath.

Tafilis laughed.

ONDINE WAS the only human person Arriangel had ever met who was indisputably more beautiful than Arriangel.

For all her astonishing beauty, Ondine lived as sparsely as an acolyte of the Dead God, without friends or lovers, in a run-down and dangerous sector of Bo'eme.

Ondine's apparent poverty was an affectation. She was the leading collateral portraitist on Dilvermoon, and had been for centuries. Now her portraits brought such fabulous prices that the hyperwealthy of Dilvermoon were compelled to commission her services, if for no other reason than to demonstrate their status.

It was therefore inevitable that the two of them would meet.

Larimone the Factor was a tall, massive man; standing over Arriangel, he seemed a cliff of dark stone, threatening to fall on her. But when he spoke to her, his hard face always grew soft with uncritical affection.

"It's an important occasion, Arriangel. This year . . . you're no longer a child; you take on the privileges and responsibilities of majority. I want to make you a suitable gift."

"It's too expensive, Father. For what she would charge, you might lease a small planet for a year." Truthfully, she felt uncomfortable with the idea of the famous portraitist looking into her mind, probing her most private thoughts, installing sensors deep in her brain stem. Ordinarily, only relatively mature persons commissioned collateral portraits — persons with powerful personalities, persons whose minds had grown rich and strange with experience. How could Ondine find the shape of her soul, when Arriangel herself had no clear idea of what she was? She was too young.

"What would I do with another world?" Larimone laughed his harsh laugh.

"I think you'd come up with something," said Arriangel.

"I'm too busy already," her demifather replied, and a shadow crossed his face, so quickly that she almost didn't notice it. A strange resonance touched her mind, as if the shadow had some meaning that she would never discover, until too late . . . but then her thoughts cleared, as though wiped clean by some phantom hand.

"Yes," she said. "All right."

Arriangel wasn't at all sure that she liked Ondine, on the evening they met. The artist greeted her, without discernible warmth, at the security lock of her studio and residence. She gestured at Arriangel's bodyguards to wait in the lock.

"I allow no armed creatures within," explained Ondine in a soft, raspy contralto.

Ondine was a woman of indeterminate age, with that ambiguous, immaterial shine that often marked humans who had lived for many centuries. In appearance, she seemed a young girl. Her body was slender and angular, clothed in an unadorned shift of coarse white fabric. Some ancestor, born under a fierce sun, had bequeathed her skin of burnished mahogany — or perhaps she simply wore a fashionable dye. Certainly that dark skin made a dramatic contrast with the pale silver of her long, braided hair, and a perfect complement to the rich amber of her eyes.

Her expressionless face was a harmonious interaction of taut planes — the swooping line of her arched brows, prominent cheekbones, the lush mouth, the high blade of her nose.

Arriangel found herself staring openmouthed, unable to decide wherein Ondine's shocking beauty lay — it seemed too unconventional to judge by any familiar standards.

Ondine smiled, very faintly, and her harsh perfection warmed into a more human loveliness. "Come along, child," she said.

Arriangel followed at her heels, breathing in Ondine's fragrance, a faint musk of desert flowers and some unfamiliar spice.

In the studio, Ondine made her sit beneath a skylight, through which a carefully synthesized bluish light poured. It bathed Arriangel in blinding brightness, so that she had to squint to see Ondine moving about, pausing occasionally, her head cocked to the side in silent appraisal.

Long minutes passed. Finally Arriangel lost patience. "What are you looking at? I thought it was my mind you would record."

"Record? Is that what you think I do?" The artist seemed mildly amused, which annoyed Arriangel.

"Well, what do you do, then?"

"Shall I show you one of my galleries?" Ondine stepped forward and took Arriangel's hand in a cool, delicate grip.

Arriangel allowed herself to be drawn toward a closed door, a massive steel thing set in the darkest corner of the studio.

Ondine pressed her palm to the ident plate, and the door slid up into its casing. Inside was more of the cold, merciless light.

"Nice," said Tafilis. "Well-chosen, Brother. I myself can hardly wait — and you know how jaded I am. But you'll have legal trouble with Ondine — mark my words. She'll lawyer us."

Memfis shut away the aching pain of his brother's voice and concentrated on his work.

Ondine led Arriangel into the gallery, a small, circular room ten meters in diameter. Set into the wall was an emperor's ransom of Ondine's collateral portraits, perhaps thirty priceless pieces.

The artist took her across the room to the far wall, where a man stared bleakly out from the ornately framed holofield. "Do you recognize him?" asked Ondine.

"No," Arriangel answered. "Who is he?"

Ondine sighed. "That was Nomun the Emancipator. He's been dead for six hundred years — so they say. I'm not sure I believe it."

Arriangel examined the portrait. Nomun possessed a hard, secretive face, much scarred, and lined by great apparent age, but retaining an aura of potency and implacable purpose. He was shown from the waist up, wearing a black uniform without insignia. Behind him, displayed in an artfully sinuous arrangement of windows, were scenes from his life. Several of these were battle scenes: one in black space between ranks of suited warriors, one of antique ships tossing on an emerald sea, one in a dripping black jungle. One window showed a scene from, presumably, Nomun's childhood — a grim street in some Howlytown, down which a gleaming hardcar trundled. From one of the car's armored ports, a wide-eyed child peeked. There was a parade of thousands, a cold desert empty but for one stumbling man, the cratered surface of some airless moon. At the top of the image was a tangle of great crystalline growths, over which many tiny Nomuns scrambled, killing each other in a hysteria of violence.

Ondine touched a switch at the bottom of the holofield, and Nomun came to life, his eyes darting from Ondine to Arriangel. The scenes behind him began to crawl with dreadful movement, and minute splashes of

blood flowered in the depths of the field.

Nomun locked his suddenly terrible eyes on Arriangel's and she gasped. In the portrait's deep black gaze, she saw a chill, quiet madness, untempered by humanity.

"Speak to him," said Ondine in an oddly urgent voice. "He was a great man in his way, though he never paid me."

Arriangel's throat felt frozen. She tried to think of a question that would not reveal her shallowness to Ondine; finally one of defensive subtlety occurred to her. "Do you like your portrait?"

The bitter mouth quirked slightly, an almost-smile, but then the terrible eyes shifted through a bewildering range of expression: despair, grief, horror. He shook his head violently, and his dark hair shed sweat in glittering, slow-motion streams across the background of the portrait.

"Like it," he said in a thin, creaky voice. "Like it?"

Then he opened his mouth, much wider than any unmodified human should have been able to, so that his face, except for those eyes, seemed to disappear behind that straining orifice.

He screamed. The sound seemed to reach out and strike Arriangel, moving her physically back. It was the most hideous sound she had ever heard, distilled dreadfulness, digging strong, dirty fingers into her ears, clawing at her own sanity.

Ondine stabbed at the switch, and the holofield stilled. Arriangel could not bear to look at the frozen, distorted face.

Ondine put her arm around Arriangel. "Was it so bad?" asked Ondine. Her flesh where she touched Arriangel had an unnatural smooth density; her skin felt like warm marble, polished to a high gloss.

Arriangel shivered, pleasantly distracted. "Perhaps not."

Ondine released her and wandered a few paces away, to stop before another portrait. "Nomun harbors a powerful madness; probably I was unkind to have shown him to you. His was a difficult and frustrating destiny — the endless freeing of slaves. His life was complicated by a catastrophic degree of fame. Never mind; here's a more pleasant madman . . . and stylish, too."

This portrait also depicted a very old man. Where Nomun's aged appearance had seemed to derive from indifference, this man's antiquity was displayed triumphantly, a badge of accomplishment, as if he had survived from a time so ancient that attaining a great age was a notable

feat. Extravagant wrinkles seamed every square centimeter of his skin, a seared and arid landscape, dominated by great magenta eyes, glittering with fey energy. Oddly, his mouth was wide and red, the mouth of a much younger man. He wore a swirling cape of green stonesilk; his huge, knobby hands appeared to grip the bottom of the holofield, as though he might at any moment hurl himself forth into Arriangel's reality. Behind him a hundred tiny, diamond-shaped windows writhed with movement, each displaying a different minuscule scene. Before Arriangel could lean close enough to see what events transpired in the tiny windows, Ondine flicked the switch, and the old man seemed to swoop toward her, thrusting his face into hers, a wild smile twitching at his incongruously youthful mouth.

"Hah!" he shouted gleefully. "What's this, my beautiful Ondine? A customer for the Flesh Tinker's knife, eh? Eh?"

Arriangel shrank away, though she detected no menace at all in the Flesh Tinker's cold, powerful voice.

Ondine smiled and shook her head. "No, her beauty is currently satisfactory to her, I think."

The old man's image withdrew into the holofield's plane and struck a disdainful pose. "How vulgar," he said.

Ondine switched him off and moved to the next portrait: a mech shaped to resemble one of the black lords of Jaworld. His deeds were recorded in angular lightning bolts behind him, and the zigzagging windows were peopled by primitively drawn figures of humans and animals, who seemed to act out mythic events.

Next to the mech was one of the ephemeral sapients of Snow, human-seeming but for her elongated body and great cracked-crystal eyes. Beyond her was a mutated human child, scaled with plates of dense, glimmery chitin, who grinned cheerfully with a lipless mouth.

Ondine called no more of her portraits to life. She drifted slowly around the perimeter of the gallery, seemingly oblivious to Arriangel, who followed in a fog of confusion and intrigue.

"You'd have to stay here for a month or two," said Ondine. "I demand at least that much commitment from my subjects."

The viewpoint shifted and spun away from Arriangel. It circled the two women, so that the portraits flowed past in all their glorious diversity,

until the two slender figures seemed to stand in a whirlwind of half-glimpsed faces, color and expression melting into a stream of humanity, infinitely rich, infinitely varied.

"Oh, very nice," said Tafilis. "Do you suppose the Ondine portrait still exists somewhere? Here's a fine idea: somehow we get access to the portrait, install it in your girl's quarters . . . and watch love bloom. It's your only chance, Brother." He laughed his unpleasant laugh.

Arriangel spent hours surrounded by the ruby-gleaming lenses of Ondine's holocameras, wearing at the nape of her neck the heavy, cold weight of a cortical exciter. The exciter twisted her face into a million different expressions, while leaving her thoughts in a state of chill abstraction. She found it a very strange sensation, but it allowed her a space of time for watching Ondine.

The artist moved about the studio with unfailing grace, always composed, always elegant, always beautiful in an unselfconscious style that Arriangel found fascinating. All of her friends who could claim great beauty seemed to put that beauty at the center of their lives, so that in every glance their eyes said: I know that you see me.

But not Ondine; she had escaped a trap whose existence Arriangel had not before perceived.

Ondine was admirable in other ways. Arriangel gradually came to a deep appreciation of Ondine's achievements as an artist. Occasionally Ondine would permit her to wander through the gallery she had first shown her, and Arriangel began to understand what marvelous objects the portraits were. To think that Ondine had captured these great souls so perfectly that they had survived intact their centuries of imprisonment in the holofields . . . alone with the memories of their tumultuous lives. . . . It seemed unimaginable.

When she realized the degree to which the portraits were conscious and self-aware, Arriangel felt a chill, and seriously considered canceling the commission. What would it be like, to live forever with a synthetic reflection of herself — no matter how artfully contrived? Would her portrait someday reproach her for permitting its existence?

She wanted to speak to Ondine about her misgivings, but she could not articulate her misgivings in any way that didn't seem puerile and shallow. Somehow the artist divined her uneasiness. She took Arriangel into her

tiny, warm kitchen.

"You're having second thoughts?" asked Ondine over cups of fragrant tea.

"It's frightening . . . to think of a person much like myself, trapped forever in a web of circuitry. . . ."

Ondine smiled. "You'd be surprised how few of my clients ever think about it. It's much to your credit that the thought has occurred to you."

"But . . . isn't it dreadful, for the portrait?"

"It can be," Ondine said. "It depends on the client. Some clients put the portraits in a vault; they commission them only to demonstrate their status, and find the portraits a personal embarrassment — or worse. Those portraits do have dreadful existences. But others do better. My portrait of Ambrin, the great dream designer, for instance; it wrote a novel that was moderately successful, and spoke to me about a portrait of itself. It didn't have the money, however." She laughed, for the first time.

This was much too bizarre a concept for Arriangel to grasp. She shook her head. "Then, you make people."

"Oh no. My portraits are merely objects of contemplation; you mustn't think of them as people."

ONCE, AFTER a particularly trying session, while Ondine's strong hands massaged life back into Arriangel's aching facial muscles, she asked, "What will you fill my windows with? After all, I'm so young. Nothing of note has ever happened to me. In fact, I can't understand why you agreed to do my portrait."

Ondine shrugged. "Larimone offered me a magnificent fee."

Arriangel felt a pang of humiliation. "Really? That's the only reason?"

Ondine smiled. "Well, no. For one thing, you're an astonishingly beautiful child . . . and of late I've neglected the simple charms of ungilded loveliness. Actually, I justify this on this basis of challenge. Who but Ondine would attempt to make great art from such formless material?"

Arriangel bit her lip, and asked no more questions that day.

After Ondine finished her physical recording, she put Arriangel under a probe, and swam Arriangel's holomnemonic ocean, trolling for experience. Now it was Ondine who seemed exhausted by each new session, and her face grew a bit pale and strained.

"Am I so disappointing?" asked Arriangel.

Ondine rubbed at her temples. "No. In fact, I find more intensity in you than I had expected. It's always so. Sometimes I think that I'd find the same passions in the dullest cipher of the darkest corridors. Perhaps we all live lives of great drama in our hearts."

Arriangel found this idea a delightfully radical one; in fact, she was delighted by every aspect of Ondine, and soon came to recognize that she had developed an infatuation for the artist. With that realization, she spent even more time gazing wistfully at her.

Always before, her seductions had gone exactly according to plan, since, for the most part, they were carefully orchestrated beforehand. But this seemed disturbingly different; Ondine was practically living inside her mind, and she could keep no secrets, practice no coquetry. It was a vulnerable situation, but somehow liberating . . . and gradually it came to seem excitingly intimate.

Arriangel experienced only dimly the memories Ondine unearthed: a scent, a sound, a fleeting image. But when Ondine drew the memory of Garso-Yao from her, she again felt that strange twist in her perceptions, as though she were moving in layers of dream, as if she had lived through that long-ago grief many times before. She came from the probe crying, feeling some gray emotion that she could put no name to.

Ondine held her and smoothed her hair, saying nothing. Arriangel leaned against her and sobbed, dismayed but unable to stop.

When finally she caught her breath, she said, "I'm sorry. Sorry. I don't know what's wrong."

"Don't worry. I pick at scabs, to see the bright blood beneath. I have to; it's my art . . . but you don't have to like it." Ondine laughed a slightly forced laugh.

Arriangel pressed her head against Ondine, whose fragrance suddenly seemed very sweet. She became aware of the shape of Ondine's breasts beneath the thin fabric of her blouse, the silky warmth of Ondine's skin against her cheek.

She felt an impulse to kiss that skin; it grew until she could no longer resist it.

"No," said Ondine, and pushed her gently away. "I have no interest in such things. If I accommodated you, it would mean nothing. It would be no more than a passionless courtesy."

"Oh?" Arriangel's face burned; she could not remember the last time

she had been refused.

"It's nothing to do with you, Arriangel. I'm very old; I've had countless lovers, and we made love in all the possible ways . . . a thousand times, ten thousand. After so long a time, it all becomes friction — an activity no more dignified than, say, picking fleas from each other's fur." She laughed, a bit ruefully. "The centuries wear away one's tolerance for indignity, I'm afraid."

"I see," said Arriangel, drawing away.

"No, don't be offended. Actually, I've grown fond of you . . . surprisingly so. You're sweet and intelligent; you take a more genuine interest in my art than anyone has in many years. Anyway, were I inclined to have sex with anyone, I'd have many reasons to choose you. If that helps."

"I'm not offended." But she was, a little. Despite this, Arriangel still found Ondine desirable. "After the portrait is done, may I stay with you, for a while?"

Ondine almost, but not quite, frowned. But after a long pause, she said, "Why not?", as though it were a decision of no moment.

"What I can't understand," said Tafilis, "is why Ondine found such a shallow little creature attractive. Love is strange, truly." He fixed an expression of melodramatic surprise on his face.

"She has a clean soul," muttered Memphis.

"How absurdly mystical."

"Perhaps. On the other hand, who would deny that dirty souls exist?" Memphis glanced at his brother, and saw annoyance cross his face.

"Really?" said Tafilis. "Well, I can already tell you that it won't work. Ondine's glands may have dried up — but not Arriangel's."

Memphis shrugged. "Love is more than dripping glands, though I don't expect you to understand that. You were never imaginative, except in the devising of torments."

"Perhaps not," said Tafilis dubiously. "But remember: our customers are no more imaginative than I."

Arriangel continued to find Ondine absorbing. Infatuation ripened into devotion, and finally she came to believe that she loved Ondine — for her brilliance, for her wry charm, for her kindness, for her vast and fascinating experience of life in Dilvermoon. And for her beauty, though

that came to seem less important as the weeks passed.

One evening, over a late dinner, Arriangel spoke idly. "Were you always so beautiful?"

"Indeed not," answered Ondine easily. "Why, once I was a squat little mudhen of a woman, with a face like a colicky frog. No, over the years I've enriched a series of lineamentors great and small, hiring their knives. I've worked hard to uncover my internal landscape. And why not? I'm a maker — should I not remake myself, if it amuses me?"

"I guess so. I've never thought to do so — maybe I'm hopelessly dull."

"Not at all, and why should you wish to tamper with a beauty as spectacular as yours? That it came to you effortlessly is a miracle." Ondine touched her hand lightly. "I find your beauty a delight. It reassures me that occasionally the universe acts benevolently."

"That's a pleasant idea." But then another thought struck Arriangel. "I suppose I don't understand. If the pleasures of the body are unimportant to you, why does it matter what you look like?"

Ondine smiled. "I admit my philosophy lacks consistency. And anyway, would you have loved me, if I were still a toad?"

Arriangel laughed, hoping that the question was entirely rhetorical. And Ondine's ambiguous response kept alive the hope that she would one day invite Arriangel to her bed. Meanwhile, she seemed not to mind whenever Arriangel visited an old lover for the night.

When finally Ondine declared the portrait finished, Arriangel expected to see it immediately, but Ondine assumed a strangely disengaged expression. "No," she said. "If you take possession of the portrait, then I must ask you to leave my home."

"But why?" Arriangel was bewildered.

"It's my rule. Too much honesty between lovers isn't good."

"But we're not lovers."

"Aren't we?" Ondine seemed saddened.

Arriangel shook her head, confused. "Is it that you think I'd be offended?"

"Perhaps." But Ondine's expression said otherwise, and Arriangel couldn't think of another reason.

"Well, it doesn't matter to me," said Arriangel, and was almost sure that she meant it.

"So, when do you start to meddle?" asked Tafilis.

"Not yet," answered Memfis. "Don't you have anything else to do?"

"Nothing compelling."

He remained, watching over Memfis's shoulder, while the devotion between Ondine and Arriangel deepened.

It was a difficult task, to show this subtle progression dramatically, but Memfis accomplished it by choosing a *mélange* of tender moments: an exchange of smiles, a gentle touch, a small kindness, a few words of comfortable conversation, meals taken together, thoughts shared.

Each brief segment was recorded as a series of almost-still images, and the effect was of memories dimmed by time but still golden. He ended each segment with a long-held shot of Ondine's eyes, growing younger.

A year passed, and then another.

Arriangel still desired Ondine, but accepted her celibacy. This was a disappointment, but survivable — or so she told herself. The two years she spent in Ondine's home were the most consistently happy years she could remember.

She eventually asked Ondine to instruct her in the craft of collateral portraiture, but Ondine refused gracefully. "No matter how talented you might prove to be, you would always be at a competitive disadvantage — and there would be competition, I can assure you."

Instead, she encouraged Arriangel to find a form all her own, and Arriangel soon settled on an ancient craft of Old Earth — jewelry formed of slender wires and molten glass. She gained a degree of skill at this craft, which added to her contentment. None of her old friends could create anything without the aid of conceptualizers and synthesizers, and she felt pleasantly set apart from them . . . a person of special substance.

But eventually she had enough rings for all her fingers. Her friends no longer accepted her gifts with genuine enthusiasm, and she grew restless. She began to be curious about her portrait, which Ondine kept in a gallery forbidden to Arriangel.

No locks barred her from the gallery, and finally one day, feeling herself secure in Ondine's affections, she decided to have a look.

The door opened to her touch, and she went inside. The walls were crowded with holofields, jammed onto every surface, a few even placed on the ceiling, so that their subjects seemed in danger of falling from their

frames.

Almost immediately she knew she had made a mistake.

The men and women in the fields were all so *ordinary*: unremarkable faces, bland expressions, unstylish clothing. Their background windows seemed to depict events of negligible color and vigor. Nobodies.

She stepped close, peered at the nearest image. It contained a man with a narrow, sallow face and large, moist eyes. He smiled benignly, if somewhat vacantly. Behind him were a dozen faceted windows, each showing a domestic scene — the man in a small apartment, watching a dreamscreens with a woman. The man swimming in a no-grav pool with the woman. The man in bed with the woman. The woman seemed vaguely familiar.

With a shock of recognition, Arriangel identified Ondine, in an earlier and less graceful body.

She went on to the next portrait, and the next, and then she understood that she was looking at portraits of Ondine's past lovers.

She found her own portrait in a corner, where the other works had been cleared away to give it a clear space.

Except for the white frame of empty wall, it wasn't much different from any of the others, an image of a pretty, but otherwise ordinary, young woman. Arriangel felt sick. All these portraits, including hers, lacked any trace of the power and presence that distinguished the other work in Ondine's galleries.

She stepped closer, and looked at the windows behind her image.

There was Garso-Yao, hanging from his cord. She quickly looked away.

Across from him was a boy she vaguely remembered. They'd met on a luxury safari into the jungled ruins that filled an ancient gouge in Dilvermoon's steel shell. In tiny detail, they shared a tent, tangled together happily.

Later the boy had been killed by a mutated beast.

Here was an interesting panel. . . . It seemed to show Ondine and Arriangel bathing together in a huge marble tub, an event that had not yet occurred. For a moment she felt a small uplift of anticipation. But then she decided that Ondine had added the scene only for its contribution to the composition, only for the artistic effect of the two beautiful, juxtaposed bodies.

"What do you think?" asked Ondine in her low, rough voice.

Arriangel whirled about, startled. Ondine leaned against the wall, arms folded, face closed. Arriangel felt her hurt give way to a brief flash of guilt, and then to a stronger pulse of anger.

"I'm not as impressed as I hoped," Arriangel said.

"Sorry."

"Is this your gallery of pets?" Arriangel indicated the jumbled portraits with a jerky gesture.

"They were all my darlings, once." She looked about, a sudden tender smile trembling on her lips. "Don't feel bad. Most find it impossible to love reality; not I. I warned you not to look."

"I see," said Arriangel icily. "Well, I suppose now I must leave your home, since I've broken your rule."

Ondine shook her head sadly. "Only if you wish to. I've grown too fond of you to send you away now."

This was somehow an unsatisfying response. "No," said Arriangel. "A rule is a rule."

MEMFIS REGRESSED the probe to the moment just before Arriangel had decided to enter the forbidden gallery.

Tafilis shook his head. "It's useless — you're just dealing with a surface effect. She's one of those who have a timer on their hearts. She'll never measure up to your standards . . . though I'm not sure anyone could."

"Leave me alone," said Memphis, sweating over his control board.

"You know, Brother, you're shamefully inconsistent. On the one hand, you chose — apparently out of sheer artistic hubris — to record an extremely unconventional romance, and on the other hand, you cling to a very rigid personal definition of love. By what convoluted inner mechanism do you resolve this?" Tafilis fixed a look of polite curiosity on his lean face.

"Love is as obdurate an emotion as hate, despite what you think."

"Oh, yes . . . you burn to reconstruct a deathless love; isn't that so? Well, you never will. Never! People live too long — no such fragile emotion can survive the centuries." Tafilis spoke as if in great earnest, but Memphis was not deceived.

"Shut up, shut up," Memphis said, so full of loathing that he could barely speak.

But Tafilis was right.

When Memphis came to tell her of their failure, he moved carefully, as if his chest were full of broken glass, and his handsome face was gray with exhaustion. He appeared to be fresh from the scene of a tragedy.

"I did my best," he said.

"I'm sure."

"Would you like to see?" Memphis asked this with such transparent pain that Arriangel agreed to look at his recording — though in fact she felt more apprehension than curiosity.

When the recording reached the point at which Ondine had forbidden her to look at her portrait, Arriangel felt a deep pang of regret.

"I guess she was afraid I'd be offended," she said.

Memfis shook his head. "Perhaps."

"What, then?"

"I think she wanted to spare you this knowledge: that you could never know her as she knew you. She was so old, and you were so young."

Arriangel looked aside at Memphis, whose attention was fixed on the screen. At the moment, despite his youthful body, he looked a thousand years old. It suddenly occurred to her to wonder how long he had been working in his Garden of Passions.

When the recording had run to its sad conclusion, he sat back and closed his eyes.

Arriangel watched him, fascinated. After a while his breathing steadied and deepened. To her astonishment, he slept.

In sleep, he regained his beauty. His face had grown smooth and guileless, and Arriangel found herself oddly moved.

She herself felt no inclination to sleep.

An hour later he still slept, and she had grown very restless. She found herself hovering over Memphis, admiring him. She thought of his kindness and courtesy, his intelligence and compassion. She looked at his strong, graceful hands, which lay open in his lap, and wondered how he might touch her, if they ever became lovers.

She sighed. "I have a history of seducing sleeping men," she muttered, and undressed.

When she laid her hand on his shoulder, he woke with unnatural speed. His eyes flew open, and for an instant, it seemed to her that they

held none of the confusion that anyone else might have shown upon awaking abruptly, that he was completely aware of the situation: her hand on his shoulder, her naked body, her heart hammering.

But he took her hand and drew her into the bedroom, and she forgot about everything else for a long time.

After, lying in his arms, she asked him why he had taken so long to come to her bed.

"I thought I had good reasons," he said. "I was trying to preserve my artistic objectivity — how could I properly mine your heart, if I loved you? And even more important . . . you were my slave . . . a bad way for lovers to begin. I didn't want you to think of yourself that way. I didn't want you to act dutifully." His face still held that unmarked innocence.

"I'm not naturally dutiful," she said, laughing.

His face darkened suddenly. "Tafilis says you have a timer on your heart."

"Does he?"

"Do you?"

She swept away the bedclothes and rose. She went to the sideboard, and with shaking hands poured a goblet of green wine.

"If I do have a timer, it hasn't started yet." She spoke with a greater anger than she had intended.

"I'm sorry," said Memfis miserably. "I've been disappointed . . . many times."

He seemed so terribly sad that her anger melted away. She came back to the bed and offered him the goblet. While he drank, she ran her fingers over the hard planes of his chest. "There's really no problem, is there? I'm still your possession."

He shook his head. "No. I couldn't own a woman I love. Tomorrow I'll satisfy your indenture to the company and buy back your Citizenship." He grinned, suddenly boyish. "Tafilis will hate that."

And though at first she couldn't believe it, her captivity was over.

In the morning, Memfis stood by while a medunit restored her Citizen's tattoo. When it was done, and Arriangel was once again a free woman of Dilvermoon, she felt a soaring happiness — until she noticed the gloom that shrouded Memfis.

"What's the matter?"

"Will you be leaving now? I'll lend you my car, if you like." His face was full of sad expectation.

"Will you come with me?"

His eyes brightened, and he smiled uncertainly. "If you like. For a while."

"For a while," she agreed. "We'll see how it goes."

Their time together went wonderfully.

She discovered that some of her personal fortune remained untouched by Larimone's collapse and Arbrand's vengeance. She took an apartment in the best quarter of Bo'eme.

There she and Memphis lived. Away from his brother and the Garden, he seemed to bloom, becoming less driven. Occasionally he returned to his work for a week or two — but these separations only made their reunions sweeter. Remembering her disaster with Ondine, Arriangel never asked Memphis about his work, and never asked to view any of his creations.

But when he was gone, she sometimes wondered if he worked with a new and more beautiful slave.

Still, he always returned to her, his eyes gentle with love.

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Her life seemed perfect, each day flowing past, leaving nothing but just the right amount of golden remembrance.

In fact, in some subtle way she could not quite identify, her life had become streamlined, shorn of complexity, free of the niggling details of existence. It seemed almost to be a progression of high points, unmuddled by everyday banality. She attributed this in part to the contrast with her time as a slave . . . and to the artistic way Memfis devoted himself to her happiness.

He was very good at making her happy. She wondered if he knew her better than she knew herself, so adept was he at steering her clear of sadness. Somehow he could always make things seem different.

A year passed before she became restless.

She never ceased to love him, but she finally understood that she needed a change.

She told him in bed, after lovemaking, thinking it kinder.

The look in his eyes made Arbrand seem no more than a peevish boy.

She felt a peculiar twist in her perceptions.

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* * *

"Has it gone wrong again, Brother?" Tafilis asked brightly. "Ah well. Better luck next time. I'll send you the validation, so you can pay off your wager."

Memfis muttered a curse under his breath.

It seemed to ignite a flare of rancor in his brother. "For once, Memfis, you ought to have the guts to do it yourself, instead of using all this nice clean machinery. You ought to rub your victims with your own sanctimonious flesh just once; just once stick in the knife with your own pure hands." Tafilis spoke with apparently genuine disgust.

Memfis ignored him. He shut down the probe and went away in silence.

Arriangel found herself abruptly returned to her apartment in the Garden of Passions. The hood of the probe rose from her face, and the straps released her.

She was alone in the room.

At first, she was sure it was a terrible dream, or perhaps she was mad. She sat on her couch and waited for it to pass. But by the time Memfis came through her door, she had drawn the correct conclusion.

"You didn't knock," she said. She existed in an emotional state beyond anger, beyond fear.

"I have only a moment," he said stiffly. "I've come to tell you that I must transfer your supervision to my brother." His face was as inhuman as any machine, tightened into a caricature of exhaustion and frustration.

She nodded slowly.

He seemed about to say something else, but then he turned and went away.

When Tafilis entered her quarters, she saw that he was dressed in a manner identical to his brother, and for a moment she wondered if she had somehow become trapped in a bad psychodrama — the sort where the monstrous twin turns out to be no more than a concealed aspect of the sympathetic twin. After all, she had never seen them together. But no. There was no possibility of that. Where Memfis had seemed weary almost to death, Tafilis bounced across the room buoyantly. His hair seemed spiky with ominous energy; his face glowed; his eyes glittered. He even

smelled different — a pungent, yeasty sourness.

"Arriangel," he said. "It's my turn now." He snapped a collar about her throat and jerked her roughly to her feet. "Come. It won't be so bad. True, I'm not like my brother . . . but on the other hand, when I rape you, at least you'll see my face."

Though Tafilis was so unlike Memfis, there was something in the uncertain texture of this moment that seemed dreadfully reminiscent of the moment before Memfis had bought her . . . when he had asked, "Can you love?"

But she gathered her courage. She had survived her enslavement and her memories; she would survive this. "What will happen if I cannot please you any better than I pleased your brother?"

"Then I must sell you." Tafilis spoke the words as if they meant nothing very much, but his smile was full of malicious promise.

"Oh."

The horrible smile widened, until Tafilis no longer resembled his brother at all. "Now I must ask you an important question, Arriangel."

"What is it?"

"Can you hate?"

"Yes," she answered, with a certain grim satisfaction, and answered his smile with one as ugly.



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Coming Attractions

THE APRIL issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* should arrive just as you're beginning your annual homework assignment from the Internal Revenue Service. Procrastinate a little: we have a number of literary treats to fill your time.

Novelist **Chelsea Quinn Yarbro**, best known in this field for her Count St. Germaine vampire stories, graces our pages for the very first time. In this wise and witty novella, an IRS agent discovers a blip in the system. When he goes to investigate, he discovers something so intimidating that not even the threat of audit scares it. The perfect little tax season story, called "Investigating Jericho."

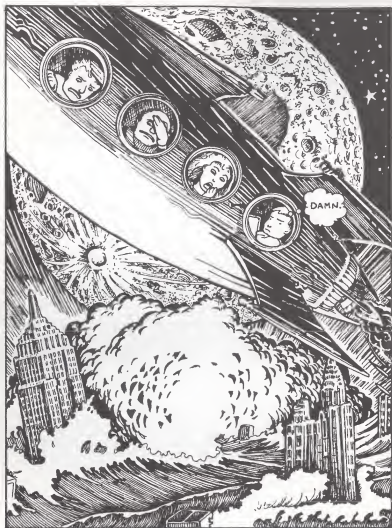
Also in April, award-winning writer **Pat Cadigan** returns after too long an absence with a science fiction tale about saving face — literally — in the "True Faces." Hugo and Nebula winner **Pat Murphy** makes her first appearance in F&SF with our cover story, a quirky little tale called "Going Through Changes."

The magazine is going through changes, and another will appear in April. Scientist, novelist, and anthologist **Gregory Benford** will contribute his first science column, in a space he will share with **Bruce Sterling**.

And, if you want to procrastinate clear past April 15th, keep an eye out for future issues. We'll have novellas by **Andrew Weiner**, **Bradley Denton**, and **Rob Chilson**, as well as short fiction by **Charles de Lint**, **Kathe Koja**, and our trusty book reviewer **Algis Budrys**.

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